

Huskers Illustrated

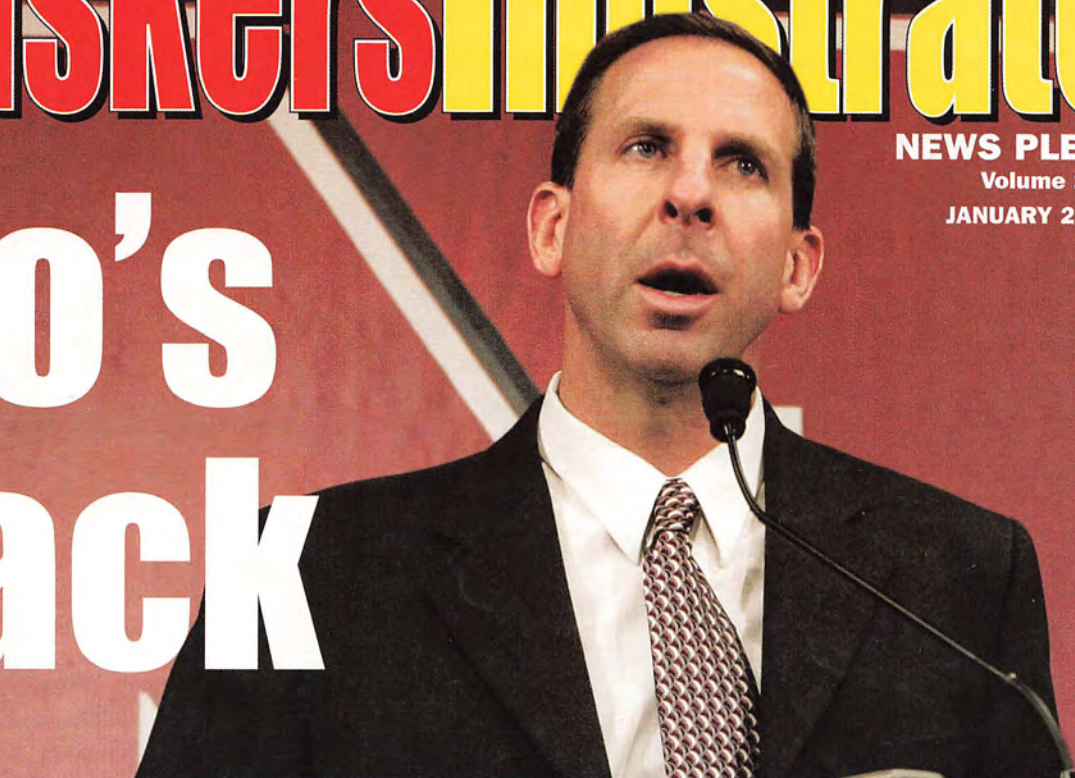
NEWS PLEASE RUSH

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Bo's Back

Pelini
returns
as 28th
NU head
coach



FEATURING



ANDY CHRISTENSEN



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... All The Time

Four Years Later . . .

*Defense a strong area of emphasis
in Osborne's selection of Pelini*



**Brian
HILL**

FOUR YEARS AGO, our January cover featured Bo Pelini with the headline "Bowling With Bo."

As the interim head coach, Pelini was charged with preparing Nebraska for the Dec. 29, 2003, Alamo Bowl game against Michigan State. Pelini, NU's defensive coordinator, had been elevated when athletic director Steve Pederson fired Frank Solich.

After Nebraska won, 17-3, to complete a 10-3 season, fans chanted, "We want Bo."

Senior linebacker T.J. Hollowell was among the players who joined in. "We can just voice our opinions, and I think it's loud and clear from the players that we want Bo Pelini," Hollowell said. "But Steve Pederson, I'm sure he's going to make the best decision for the program."

No one needs to be reminded that the choice was former Oakland Raiders head coach Bill Callahan.

Four years later, Callahan has been fired, Pederson is back at Pittsburgh as athletic director, and Pelini has his "dream" job at Nebraska.

You can read much, much more about Pelini's hiring and other events surrounding the football program in this edition of *Huskers Illustrated*. This month's player profile features injury-plagued guard Andy Christensen, who is on the comeback trail after suffering a torn ACL in the USC game.

Pelini and his new staff, which had yet to be officially announced as this

issue went to press, hurriedly went to work trying to hold together a recruiting class, as many players had been waiting to see what happened in Lincoln.

Pelini and former NU quarterback and assistant Turner Gill, the 2007 Mid-American Conference Coach of the Year at Buffalo, apparently were at the top of the list of candidates. Interim athletic director Tom Osborne moved quickly, introducing his new coach eight days after Callahan's dismissal.

In evaluating candidates for the job, Osborne had cited defense as a strong area of emphasis, and Pelini's credentials were certainly impressive. In his

one season as co-defensive coordinator at Oklahoma, the Sooners played for a national championship. LSU ranked third nationally in total defense in each of his three seasons in Baton Rouge.

In that 2003 Alamo Bowl victory, NU limited Michigan State to 174 total yards, including 45 rushing, intercepted three passes and sacked the quarterback five times.

The Huskers ranked 11th in total defense in 2003 and had a nation-leading 32 interceptions in Pelini's season as defensive coordinator.

In 12 games this season, Nebraska allowed an average of 476.8 yards per game (112th nationally) and finished with just eight interceptions and 18 sacks. The dismal defensive performance played a huge role in a 5-7 season, as NU missed qualifying for a bowl game for the second time in four seasons.

"You start going through some tough times, and people forget what it takes to win and how to win, and a bit of doubt starts creeping in their minds," Pelini said in an interview on the Jim Rome Show. "We have to remove that doubt and get believing again." ■



ON THE COVER

The day after leading LSU's defense in the SEC championship game, Bo Pelini was named head coach at Nebraska. Cover photo by Scott Bruhn.

Huskers Illustrated

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**EDITOR,
GENERAL MANAGER**
Brian Hill

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
Mike Babcock

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Terry Douglass, Bob Hamar,
Katelyn Kerkhove, Curt
McKeever, Rick Shaw, Sean
Stevens, Rivals.com

**CONTRIBUTING
PHOTOGRAPHERS**
Scott Bruhn, NU Sports
Information, Rivals.com

**SPORTS MARKETING
& ADVERTISING DIRECTOR**
Tim Francis
(800) 524-9527, ext. 111

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HI Online

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E-Mail Addresses

Editorial: hieditor@aol.com
Advertising: tfrancis@icni.com

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Bo Pelini needed no introduction, really, for players or for fans. His hiring was anticipated from the moment the eight-day search began. *By Mike Babcock*



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There was no doubt about what was going to happen when Andy Christensen went down in the first quarter of the USC game. *By Mike Babcock*

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Long List Of Mentors

Pelini says he's tried to take pieces from all the coaches he's worked for



Terry DOUGLASS

BO PELINI CREDITS the influence of several of the head coaches he's worked for in helping him become Nebraska's new head football coach.

The list of Pelini's mentors includes several well-known names in pro and college football. During his nine seasons as an assistant in the NFL at San Francisco, New England and Green Bay, he worked for coaches such as George Siefert, Ray Rhodes, Pete Carroll and Mike Sherman.

Pelini has spent the past five seasons in the college game, where he has worked for such prominent coaching names as Oklahoma's Bob Stoops and LSU's Les Miles. Pelini has been the defensive coordinator for the past three seasons under Miles, leading the Tigers to top-three national finishes in total defense each year.

While it's difficult to say that anyone is truly ready to be a head coach without actually having the experience, Pelini said he's been grooming himself for the job since first getting into coaching in 1993. He said he tried to take pieces from all of the coaches he's worked for and apply them to his own coaching style.

"I've been very fortunate in my coaching career in the people I've been around and the success that we've been able to have and the type of people," said Pelini, whose college teams have gone 55-10 with him helping coordinate the defensive coaching staffs. "Because one thing I've learned is you win with quality people. You win with high-character people and doing things the right way and not trying to cheat the system and work for shortcuts."

During the interview process, Pelini spoke with Carroll, Stoops and Miles to get their advice.

"They all have great perspective on it," Pelini said. "I talked to Pete Carroll all along the way. I talked to Bob . . . and, obviously, Coach Miles has helped me all along the way, so I've got a lot of people who have had my best interest at heart and continue to."

"Those are people who are important to me and will continue to be important to me, and it's a great thing. It helps to have a good support system."

Carroll, now the head coach at Southern California, had Pelini on his staff for five seasons in the NFL and said Nebraska has hired a great football coach.

"He is a success due to his work ethic, toughness and the great schemes that he brings," Carroll said of Pelini. "I wish him the very best. He will be a great head coach."

Perhaps because they both grew up in Youngstown, Ohio, and lived down the street from each other, Pelini is often compared to Oklahoma's Stoops. During an appearance on Jim Rome's nationally syndicated radio program, Pelini said he hopes he can have the same kind of impact at Nebraska that

Stoops has had with the Sooners.

"Obviously, Bob is one of the best out there," Pelini told Rome. "I think, when he's done, he'll be one of the best to ever coach in college. He's done a phenomenal job at Oklahoma, and I had the opportunity to, obviously, grow up knowing the Stoopses and Bob for a long time."

Pelini also worked under Stoops for one season in 2004.

"Bo is a great person and a great coach," Stoops said. "He did a wonderful job for us while he was on our staff, and he has obviously been successful at his other stops as well. He's ready to be a head coach, and I am sure he will do an excellent job for Nebraska."

While some of Pelini's mentors rank among college football's coaching elite, during the press conference where he was introduced as Nebraska's head coach on Dec. 2, Pelini twice mentioned the man who gave him his first job in college football as the Cornhuskers' defensive coordinator in 2003. That person, of course, was former NU coach Frank Solich.

"A large reason why I'm standing here today — and I want to make sure that I give credit where credit is due — is Coach Solich," Pelini said.

A longtime assistant under Hall of Fame coach Tom Osborne, Solich was 58-19 in his six seasons at Nebraska's helm. However, former NU athletic director Steve Pederson felt the program was slipping from the lofty standards that Osborne had set and fired Solich in 2003 following a 9-3 regular season.

Pelini was then named as Nebraska's interim head coach to temporarily replace Solich and led the Huskers to a 17-3 victory over Michigan State in the Alamo Bowl.

While Pelini figures he'll encounter several new challenges as a first-time head coach, the 39-year-old said he has the built-in advantage of having Osborne as the interim athletic director. During his 25 seasons at Nebraska, Osborne recorded 255 victories and won three national titles.

Pelini said Osborne has provided him with a lot of insight about what's been happening at Nebraska, which just completed a 5-7 season, and what needs to occur in the short term to get the program turned around. Plus, Pelini sees Osborne as yet another fountain of coaching knowledge to draw upon.

"I think that's one of the advantages that I have is I'm going to be working as a first-time head coach under a legend, who's going to be right there and somebody I can lean on and ask questions of," Pelini said of Osborne. "The first time you do something, there are going to be things that come up that you're not sure of. Having Coach Osborne here and being the athletic director and being able to draw on his experience and his knowledge will do nothing but benefit me." ■

Terry Douglass is the sports editor of the Grand Island (Neb.) Independent. He can be reached at terry.douglass@msn.com.



Bo Pelini was an assistant for three NFL teams.

How Strong?

Bowl bids show how difficult it was to sort out pecking order in Big 12



Curt McKEEVER

FORGET FOR A MOMENT any great debate about the overall strength of Big 12 Conference football in 2007. Heck, it's been tough enough determining the top teams in the league.

Yeah, Oklahoma beat Missouri for a second time to win the Big 12 championship. But to ensure themselves a spot in that game, the Sooners had to beat Oklahoma State on the final Saturday of the regular season.

Had the Cowboys won that contest, they would have been co-champs of the South Division with OU and Texas. League officials then would have had to revert to the final tiebreaker — the BCS standings — in order to determine which club would have advanced to the championship game.

Meanwhile, the North came down to the last game between Kansas and Missouri.

Eight days later, the Jayhawks got a payback of sorts, as the Orange Bowl ended up selecting them over the Tigers as a Bowl Championship Series at-large team. That's right, with one loss Missouri went from No. 1 in the country to out of the BCS.

"Kansas and Missouri were back to back next to each other," Orange Bowl chief executive officer Eric Poms said. "Having a one-loss team compared to a two-loss team was the most pressing thing we looked at."

A bit confused? You're not alone.

In the final USA Today coaches' poll, Oklahoma's Bob Stoops voted his team No. 1, Missouri No. 3 and Kansas No. 4. Texas Tech's Mike Leach saw Kansas No. 3, OU No. 4 and Missouri No. 6. Colorado's Dan Hawkins had the Big 12 teams in the same order as Stoops, but at Nos. 2, 5 and 7. Texas' Mack Brown offered a third configuration, with Oklahoma No. 3, Kansas No. 4 and Missouri No. 8.

Leach said he had difficulty filling out the entire ballot, furthering his notion that NCAA Bowl Subdivision is desperately in need of a playoff system.

That's arguable, of course, even though final-week results allowed idle Ohio State and two-loss LSU to move into the coveted 1-2 spots in the final BCS rankings. And if LSU hadn't gotten the nod, another two-loss club, Virginia Tech, stood next in line to face the Buckeyes, while Oklahoma came up two spots short after vaulting from the No. 9 position.

And so you want to know how strong the Big 12 was this season, huh? Well, if you're using quarterback play as your barometer, it's probably never been better.

Consider that OU redshirt freshman Sam Bradford set a freshman record for touchdown passes, Texas Tech's Graham Harrell led the country in nearly every passing statistic, and Oklahoma State's Zac Robinson replaced 1988 Heisman Trophy winner Barry Sanders as the school's single-season total-yardage leader — and neither made first- or second-team All-Big 12. That recognition went to Missouri's Chase Daniel and KU's Todd Reesing.

Daniel's status hardly came off surprising. The junior was the

primary reason the Tigers were the media's preseason choice to win the Big 12 North. Kansas had been picked fourth in that same poll, but broke through in a big way thanks to the play of a sophomore quarterback who hadn't started before this season.

Besides missing on the Jayhawks, the media's worst tags came with picking Nebraska second in the North (the Huskers tied Iowa State for last) and Texas Tech fifth in the South (the Red Raiders tied for third).

Be careful not to read too much into that fact relative to the Big 12's strength. The league still will have eight chances during the bowl season to prove where it stands in the power-conference pecking order.

It seems fitting, then, that the Big 12's top drawing card, Texas, has the first shot against an Arizona State team that thought it would be in a BCS game rather than the Holiday Bowl.

Here's an overview for Big 12 bowl teams:

Holiday, Dec. 27: Texas vs. Arizona State. The Longhorns lost to Texas A&M 38-30 in their last game, but they'll put more into this one than you might think. They need a victory to extend their streak to seven straight seasons with 10 or more wins.

Alamo, Dec. 29: Texas A&M vs. Penn State. This game sold out faster than any other Alamo Bowl. Credit that to Joe Paterno's stature, or else the curiosity factor of Gary Darnell leading the Aggies in the interim. Remember, Dennis Franchione resigned about an hour after A&M beat Texas, and he was quickly replaced by Houston Texans assistant head coach Mike Sherman.

Independence, Dec. 30: Colorado vs. Alabama. For beating Nebraska in their regular-season finale, the Buffaloes get to play a Crimson Tide team that comes crawling in with a four-game losing streak. This is a huge game for CU. The Buffs could have a winning record one year after they went 2-10 in Dan Hawkins' first season.

Insight, Dec. 31: Oklahoma State vs. Indiana. The kind folks in Tempe, Ariz., are really mad at Nebraska. They were set to take the Huskers if they'd shown up in the second half at Colorado. Since the Buffs had already played at Arizona State, the Insight had to go with OSU. Still, this one could produce some fireworks. OSU scored at least 39 points in its six wins.

Gator, Jan. 1: Texas Tech vs. Virginia. The Red Raiders became a lot more attractive after they beat Oklahoma in their next-to-last game. Will they be as excited to play a team that is just as good defensively as OU?

Cotton, Jan. 1: Missouri vs. Arkansas. The Tigers must put aside the disappointment of losing the chance to play for the national title. If they're unable to do so, the Razorbacks are capable of pulling a repeat of their triple-overtime win against LSU that nearly cost the Tigers the chance to play for the BCS crown.

Fiesta, Jan. 2: Oklahoma vs. West Virginia. This could be the Big 12's best "statement game." OU would be in the national championship contest if not for the loss to Texas Tech. The Mountaineers would be in New Orleans if they hadn't dropped their finale to Pitt.

Orange, Jan. 3: Kansas vs. Virginia Tech. For most of the second half of the Missouri game, the Jayhawks moved the ball at will and looked like the team that led the Big 12 in scoring. If they do that against the nation's No. 2 scoring defense, the Big 12 will have one final convincing argument about its overall strength. ■

Curt McKeever is a sportswriter for the Lincoln Journal Star. In addition to reporting on football, he is the primary beat writer for baseball. Curt can be reached at cmckeever@journalstar.com



Oklahoma's Bob Stoops voted his team No. 1.

Welcome Back



Interim athletic director Tom Osborne welcomes Bo Pelini at a Dec. 2 news conference at Memorial Stadium.

No introduction really necessary

By Mike Babcock

The Dec. 2 news conference was scheduled to begin at 4 p.m. in the sixth floor press box at Memorial Stadium. But there was concern about whether Bo Pelini would arrive in time.

A report the plane carrying him

and his family to Lincoln had landed that Sunday morning was erroneous. The conclusion on which the report was based was accurate, however. Pelini was going to be named Nebraska's 28th head football coach, just 11 days before his 40th birthday.

Interim athletic director Tom Osborne was already talking to the

players when Pelini finally got to the stadium. Pelini walked in "real nonchalant," junior defensive end Zach Potter said.

"Coach Osborne said, 'Hey, Bo, how are you doing?'"

Osborne never formally introduced Pelini to the players.

"It was actually kind of funny," said Potter.

Pelini needed no introduction, really, for players or for fans. His hir-

Opening Remarks

Bo Pelini introduced his family: wife Mary Pat, son Patrick (8) and daughters Kate (6) and Caralyn (4), who was born in Lincoln. "So that's karma," he said.

Patrick, who wore a Nebraska hat, was "probably a little freaked out losing all his purple stuff," Pelini said, referring to LSU gear. "But that's OK; he's already got his red on, ready to go."

After the introductions, he spoke for the first time as Nebraska's head coach.

"I'm excited to be here. I'm excited for the opportunity. This is a special place. We were only here for whatever it was, nine months or a year, whatever it was; it seemed like about three years. But you recognize something special, not only the state, the city of Lincoln, everything associated with Nebraska football, and really the University of Nebraska is really special.

"It's an honor to be standing here as the head coach and be given the opportunity that's been given to us. I look forward to the opportunity to work with the young men that are here and go out and recruit the best in the state of Nebraska to try and get this program back on track, to a point where everybody in the state is extremely proud of what we have going.

"I think that's what makes the University of Nebraska unique over any place I've been in coaching, is how much it means to the state. It's like one big family. And that's what I want it to be. I look back at all the tradition and the things that have gone on here and the great players and the great teams that have played here, and I want to bring every single one of those players and coaches and the people that have all contributed to the University of Nebraska back into the fold, and let them know I might be the head coach now, but they're all part of the family.

"We have an open-door policy, and we want everybody to draw on the tradition to allow us to move this program forward and get the best out of everything we can do. I'm looking forward to the opportunity. We're going to be moving quick. I have a lot of work to do and a short amount of time to do it, to get this thing headed in the right direction. We've got a couple of weeks here to get recruiting and I want to go out there and get some players, get the recruiting started and make sure we get off on the right foot. There's a lot of work to be done.

"Coach Osborne's given me a lot of insight into what's been going on and to how . . . what needs to be done in a short amount of time, in the short term. And I think that's one of the advantages I have is, I'm going to be



working as a first-time head coach under a legend, who's going to be right there as somebody I can lean on and ask questions of because that's one thing I understand in this business and really all you do in life; you never have it figured out.

"The first time you do something, there are going to be things that come up that you're not sure of. And having Coach Osborne here, being the athletic director, and being able to draw on his experience and his knowledge, it will be nothing but (a) benefit (to) me. It'll do nothing but allow me to do my job that much better. So I'm looking forward to the opportunities that have been presented to me and I'm looking forward to getting this thing headed off in the right direction.

"I'm excited to be here. It's an honor."

ing was anticipated from the time his predecessor, Bill Callahan, walked off the field in Boulder, Colo., the day after Thanksgiving. Many were encouraging it before Osborne announced Callahan's contract would not be renewed.

Even so, Pelini's hiring wasn't rubber-stamped. Osborne was typically thorough in his hiring homework. He

considered other candidates, including former Cornhusker quarterback and assistant Turner Gill, the Mid-American Conference Coach of the Year in his second season at Buffalo.

Reportedly, Osborne also interviewed Wake Forest's Jim Grobe and the names of several other coaches were discussed in the media during the search, among them Cincinnati's

Brian Kelly, Navy's Paul Johnson, Boise State's Chris Peterson and Texas Christian's Gary Patterson.

"I was pleased and gratified with the number of coaches who were interested in coming here, a lot of really well-qualified people," Osborne said at the introductory news conference.

Nebraska retained a search firm in

Atlanta to help in the process. But Osborne and Chancellor Harvey Perlman flew to Baton Rouge, La., before going on to Atlanta.

No need to search, really. They knew where to find qualified candidates.

Pelini and Gill remained at the top of the list in media reports. And as the week following the Colorado game passed, the signs pointed toward Pelini. Had Gill been the choice, the announcement could have come sooner because Buffalo's 5-7 season was finished. Pelini was focused on responsibilities as defensive coordinator at LSU, which defeated Tennessee 21-14 in the Southeastern Conference championship game in Atlanta the night before the announcement of his hiring.

After the game, Pelini told LSU players that Nebraska was his "dream" job. He didn't say he would be taking it, however. And he returned to Baton Rouge with the team that night.

For many, Pelini was the dream candidate for the job, and had been since the firing of Frank Solich following the regular season in 2003. Then-athletic director Steve Pederson named Pelini interim head coach for the Cornhuskers' Alamo Bowl game against Michigan State.

And Pelini responded by preparing the team for a 17-3 victory in which Michigan State's offense was rendered ineffective. The Spartans managed just 174 total yards, including 45 rushing. Nebraska intercepted three passes and sacked the quarterback five times.

Michigan State's points came on a 46-yard field goal late in the first quarter.

Afterward, Cornhusker fans in an Alamodome crowd of 56,226 enthusiastically chanted: "We want Bo. We want Bo." About a month shy of four years later, they got their wish.

"That was a special night," Pelini said. "It was a lot of emotion. And a lot of it didn't have to do with me. There were a lot of things going on then, with a lot of people involved."

The excitement of the Alamo Bowl victory subsided, however. Pelini was given what turned out to be a token interview for the head coach's job, as was Gill. Then the search to replace Solich began in earnest. Forty-one



Bo Pelini was the center of attention at the news conference announcing his hiring, the day after he coached the LSU defense in the Southeastern Conference championship game in Atlanta.

days passed before Pederson announced Callahan's hiring.

Pelini's hiring was accomplished in one-fifth the time.

Osborne cited three areas of emphasis in evaluating candidates for the job: leadership, an understanding of Nebraska's tradition and defense, which topped the list — and in all likelihood, was the deciding factor in separating Pelini and Gill, with whom Osborne has always been close.

"As you know, occasionally you'll win a game if you give up 50 points," Osborne said. "But you're not going to win very many. And so that was a major concern."

A week before, Colorado had won despite allowing Nebraska to score 51.

"Every place he's been in recent years, they've been either at the top or very near the top in most defensive

statistics," Osborne said of Pelini, who spent one season as co-defensive coordinator at Oklahoma before going to Baton Rouge with coach Les Miles.

Oklahoma won the Big 12 championship and played for a national title his season there, while LSU has ranked third nationally in total defense in each of his three seasons.

Nebraska's defense was a disaster this season, ranking 112th nationally, allowing a school record 476.83 yards per game, including 232.17 rushing — 116th in the nation. The Cornhuskers ranked 114th in scoring defense, 83rd in pass defense and 75th in pass efficiency defense.

In addition, they were 112th in quarterback sacks, averaging barely one per game.

Pelini had earned the respect of Nebraska fans long before the Alamo Bowl game, reshaping a Cornhusker



Scott Eubank

defense that had been lacking during a 7-7 season in 2002, ranking 55th in the nation in total defense, 45th in scoring defense and 73rd in turnover margin. In 2003, Nebraska ranked 11th in total defense, second in scoring defense and first in turnover margin, with a nation-leading 32 interceptions.

Still, statistics, as impressive as they might be, don't express what those who have played for and coached with Pelini describe as his passion for the game. "All of them are very impressed with his ability to inspire people, to get them to play with a lot of tenacity, with emotion," said Osborne.

"Bo has a reputation for being very straightforward, very honest, and that's something the players like, something they appreciate very much. So I think leadership issues are certainly very important."

That aspect of Pelini's personality is difficult to define. Osborne used

humor, referring to Lincoln Journal Star columnist Steve Sipple, who described Pelini as charismatic.

"That was really impressive to me because I've never heard Sipple say anything . . . say a word that big before," Osborne said, laughing. "It's certainly something I never was."

"It applies to Bo, so we appreciate that."

The collective "we" was a reference to Nebraska and its football tradition. There was a distancing from tradition over the last four years, whether conscious or otherwise. Whomever he hired would have to understand "what's unique about the place, what isn't unique," said Osborne.

Though only one element of that uniqueness, walk-ons are essential to Nebraska, not only for what they can contribute to the team but also by connecting program and state.

Pelini was asked specifically about that. "The more young men . . . and

more towns you get involved, have represented on your football team and in your program around the state, it's just going to keep building strength," he said. "The more walk-ons you're able to bring in your program with that passion and that desire to be part of the Husker football program, the stronger you're going to be and the stronger the state's going to be because of it. I do believe it's extremely important."

The walk-on program is "something we're going to cultivate and try and draw back upon," he said. "I don't know what's happened over the last few years. And I'm not really worried about that. Like I say, I'm not going to talk about that because I can't speak educated on what's happened here the last couple of years. All I'm worried about is the here and now, where we're headed in the future."

In announcing that Callahan's contract would not be renewed eight days earlier, Osborne said that one of Callahan's assistants admitted that he hadn't understood the lofty standard to which Cornhusker football was held and that as a result, he hadn't really known what he was getting himself into.

Pelini learned during his one season at Nebraska. But even if that hadn't been the case, he would have been all right. "Honestly, I don't concern myself with expectations," he said. "That takes care of itself. This wouldn't be a great job to take if there weren't built-in expectations. We expect to be good. I expect to be good. I expect to put a product on the field, and off the field, that this state will be proud of."

"That's what's important to me. I can't concern myself with what everybody else thinks or wants or does. We have to do what we feel is necessary to have a product and a team the state's going to be proud of in every way. And that's on the field, off the field, in the classroom."

The bottom line, of course, is winning. "But there's a lot more to it," he said.

"I look forward to any kind of expectations because I've never gone into a job or been a part of a program where we don't have our own. Our self-imposed expectations will be a lot greater than what the fans are out

there thinking. I look forward to any challenges people lay out for us."

His initial meeting with the players was brief. He described the atmosphere he intended to establish and "the culture we will live by, one of accountability and trust, belief in one another and the family atmosphere we want to build in the program," he told reporters.

"Hopefully it was productive and they understand that I'm not just here to be the head coach and a dictator; I'm here to serve a number of roles, and one of those roles is to make sure they have a very positive experience as a student-athlete at the University of Nebraska."

For the program to be successful, student-athletes have to be the focus, as former Cornhusker outside linebacker Trev Alberts pointed out. The 1993 All-American and Butkus Award winner returned to Lincoln for the hiring news conference — his first trip back in a long time.

The teams on which he played were successful, with a combined record of 38-9-1. They won two Big Eight championships outright and tied for another. His senior season, Nebraska played No. 1-ranked Florida State for a national championship, coming up just a field goal short.

The 1993 team set the stage for three national titles in Osborne's final four seasons. And Alberts was a key figure in the decision to change to an attacking 4-3 base defense.

But reflecting on his career, "I'll focus on my overall experience, the culture, what it was like to be a Husker," Alberts said. "That's what I lived for. That's the dream."

"I feel terrible for those kids the last four years who'll be like me someday, some old, 38-year-old guy, and maybe they don't feel the way I feel. That's painful to me. So now I'm happy that these kids are going to get to feel like I feel in 10 years. And that's important to me."

"It's the whole, collective experience of being a Husker that stays with you."

And with Pelini in charge, "we have that back here now," said Alberts.

He and Potter stood at the back of the packed room and listened as Pelini answered reporters' questions



Bo Pelini, defensive coordinator in 2003, congratulates cornerback Pat Ricketts after an interception against Colorado. NU led the nation with 32 interceptions that season.

with the cool and calm of an experienced head coach. Potter was recruited by Pelini as a junior at Omaha's Creighton Prep High School in 2003 and was impressed, he said, by Pelini's "honesty and telling you straightforward what you had to do to get better and what you were good at."

The players' response to their new head coach was enthusiastic, even though the meeting had been brief.

"They had smiles on their face," Potter said. "You can just tell that he has that fire."

In a sense, Potter was like many Cornhusker fans. Pelini needed no introduction.

"With all the speculation, the newspapers, the Internet and people calling you, I had a pretty good idea of who we were going to hire," said Potter. "But no one really knew for sure until he walked in the door." ■



Bo Pelini gets a shower at the end of the 2003 Alamo Bowl, when he served as interim head coach for Nebraska's 17-3 victory over Michigan State. Barney Cotton (right), an assistant on that team, is returning as offensive line coach.

BACK TO BATON ROUGE

The top teams in the BCS rankings constantly changed throughout the season, and after LSU dropped from the top spot as a result of its second overtime loss of the season, 50-48 against Arkansas in three overtimes, the Tigers' chances of playing for a national championship were slim.

They went into the SEC championship game against Tennessee at No. 7. But No. 1 Missouri and No. 2 West Virginia both lost that day, allowing LSU to jump to No. 2 and Ohio State to No. 1. So the Buckeyes and Tigers will play for the national title in New Orleans on Jan. 7.

And Bo Pelini will be coordinating the LSU defense.

Tom Osborne, Nebraska's interim athletic director, gave Pelini the go-ahead.

"I am confident that Bo is handling his responsibilities in his new job here as effectively as possible," Osborne said in a release. "The two-week dead period in recruiting gives him a chance to take care of some unfinished business at LSU without really putting us in any kind of bind." Pelini immediately began recruiting and putting together a staff. The NCAA dead period for recruiting began in mid-December, to prevent teams preparing for bowl games from being at a disadvantage.

LSU coach Les Miles asked him to stay on through the national title game, said Pelini, who played at Ohio State (1987-90). "But before saying yes, I wanted to make sure it would not interfere with what we're trying to get done at Nebraska and also make sure that it had Coach Osborne's approval."



Shawn Watson

ASSISTANTS

Though no official announcements had been made when this issue of Huskers Illustrated went to press, it appeared that eight of nine full-time assistant coaches had been identified. They included carryovers from Callahan's staff Shawn Watson and Ted Gilmore, former Cornhusker assistants Ron Brown, Barney Cotton, Marvin Sanders and Carl Pelini (a Husker grad assistant in 2003), as well as Mike Ekeler and John Papuchis, both of whom will come from LSU. The first four were projected as offensive coaches, the last four as defensive coaches, though again, there was no official announcement.

The likely scenario seemed to be that Watson would serve as offensive coordinator and Sanders as defensive coordinator, although Pelini indicated he would be very much involved with the defense, "even to the point, I'm sure, I'll be calling the defense in the foreseeable future. 'It's something I enjoy and have a passion for. It's part of who I am as coach.'"

Even so, "I want to be involved in every aspect of the team," he said. "Even as a defensive coordinator you all know I was a walk-around coordinator. But I think that one of the keys of being a leader and managing is being able to have involvement and have your influence not be overbearing."

The key to effective management is "balance," he said. "I have to know what's going on. I have to have my influence. But at the same time, I have to give people room to cultivate their own positions and do their job and have their own little style, but within the framework which we set forth."

AS FOR OFFENSE

Pelini said he wanted the offense to be multiple. "They've done a lot of good things on offense around here of late," he said. "They've been moving the football. So I don't expect any drastic, crazy, wholesale change. But there will be some different wrinkles. Time will tell on that. It's a little bit too early to definitively say, 'This is what we're going to do.' " Nebraska ranked 11th nationally in total offense and tied for 28th in scoring this season. The Cornhuskers were eighth in passing but 71st in rushing.

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

Because of the urgency in recruiting, Osborne went on the road to help out while the staff of assistants was being put together (Watson and Gilmore continued to recruit). First, however, Osborne had to pass an NCAA test involving recruiting rules — he did so on his first try — and he had to become an "interim" coach.

PERFECT RECORD

Among the reasons he hired Pelini, Osborne said, was the fact that "he's the only Division I-A coach who has gone undefeated in the last four years, so his record is 100 percent. And there aren't many guys like that out there." Pelini's record as a head coach is 1-0, of course.

FOLLOW BO NOW

Osborne indicated he would move quickly in hiring a replacement for Bill Callahan. And he did. During the eight-day search, he was dogged by reporters. "I'm really glad to see Bo because now you don't have to follow me anymore. There's the guy to follow around," he said, referring to Pelini. And at the end of his introduction, he said, "I promise you you're not going to hear much from me anymore."

BACK TO PITT

Two days before Pelini was introduced as head coach, former Cornhusker athletic director Steve Pederson was introduced as athletic director at Pittsburgh. Pederson, who received a \$2.2 million buyout from Nebraska, was the Pittsburgh athletic director from 1996-2002. The Panthers had been looking for an athletic director since September, when Jeff Long left for Arkansas.

"Leaving here five years ago was the hardest professional decision that we have ever made," Pederson said at the news conference. "Coming back at this time is the

easiest."

HERBIE'S ENDORSEMENT

ESPN college football analyst Kirk Herbstreit was a sophomore quarterback at Ohio State (recruited by Pederson, incidentally) when Pelini was a senior free safety and co-captain for the Buckeyes.

"I've watched his career closely, both in the NFL and as one of the best coordinators in college football," Herbstreit said. "There is no question he is ready to take the step from high-level coordinator to becoming a leader of a first-class program like Nebraska."

"Bo will out-work anybody and everybody to get Nebraska back among the elite of college football."

RESIGNATIONS

The shake-up in the football program went beyond coaches, of course. Tim Cassidy resigned his position as associate athletic director for football to take a similar position at Texas A&M following the hiring of Mike Sherman as head coach — replacing Dennis Franchione.

Head strength coach Dave Kennedy, a Nebraska graduate, also resigned. Like Cassidy, he was brought back to Nebraska by Bill Callahan.

NEBRASKA'S HEAD COACHES

Bo Pelini is the 28th head football coach in Nebraska history. Though Dr. Langdon Frothingham is listed as coach of the university's first football team in 1890, he was a faculty member who helped organize and prepare the team for games against the Omaha YMCA and Doane College. The university's first paid coach was Frank Crawford, who also played on occasion, in 1893 and 1894. Crawford's annual salary was about \$500 and might have included tuition waivers. The first all-year (full-time) coach was Ewald O. "Jumbo" Stiehm in 1911.

Frank Crawford (1893-94)	9-4-1 (.679)
Charles Thomas (1895)	6-3 (.667)
E.N. Robinson (1896-97)	11-4-1 (.719)
Fielding H. Yost (1898)	8-3 (.727)
A. Edwin Branch (1899)	1-7-1 (.167)
Walter C. "Bummy" Booth (1900-05)	46-8-1 (.845)
Amos Foster (1906)	6-4 (.600)
W.C. "King" Cole (1907-10)	25-8-3 (.736)
Ewald O. "Jumbo" Stiehm (1911-15)	35-2-3 (.913)
E.J. "Doc" Stewart (1916-17)	11-4 (.733)
William G. Kline (1918)	2-3-1 (.417)
Henry Schulte (1919-20)	8-6-3 (.559)
Fred Dawson (1921-24)	23-7-2 (.750)
Ernest E. Bearg (1925-28)	23-7-3 (.742)
Dana X. Bible (1929-36)	50-15-7 (.743)
Lawrence McCeney "Biff" Jones (1937-41)	28-14-4 (.652)
Glenn Presnell (1942)	3-7 (.300)
Adolph J. Lewandowski (1943-44)	4-12 (.250)
George "Potsy" Clark (1945/1948)	6-13 (.316)
Bernie Masterson (1946-47)	5-13 (.278)
Bill Glassford (1949-55)	31-35-3 (.471)
Pete Elliott (1956)	4-6 (.400)
Bill Jennings (1957-61)	15-34-1 (.310)
Bob Devaney (1962-72)	101-20-2 (.829)
Tom Osborne (1973-97)	255-49-3 (.836)
Frank Solich (1998-2003)	58-19 (.753)
Bill Callahan (2004-07)	27-22 (.551)

*Bo Pelini

*Record of 1-0 as interim head coach in 2003

THE BO PELINI FILE



Personal

Birthdate: December 13, 1967 in Youngstown, Ohio

Wife: Mary Pat

Children: Patrick (8), Kate (6), and Caralyn (4)

High School: Cardinal Mooney, 1986

College: Ohio State, 1990

Playing Experience

1987-90 Ohio State free safety

Coaching Experience

1991 Iowa graduate assistant
1993 Cardinal Mooney High School quarterbacks

1994-96 San Francisco 49ers	defensive backs
1997-99 New England Patriots	linebackers
2000-02 Green Bay Packers	linebackers
2003 Nebraska	defensive coordinator, interim head coach for Alamo Bowl
2004 Oklahoma	co-defensive coordinator, defensive backs
2005-07 LSU	defensive coordinator

Head Coaching Experience

2003 Nebraska	interim head coach, 1-0 def. Michigan St., 17-3 in Alamo Bowl
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2007 Huskers



ANDY CHRISTENSEN
Offensive Guard

He knew immediately what had happened

By **MIKE BABCOCK** ● Photos: **SCOTT BRUHN**

The process has already begun. And the prognosis is positive. Even though Andy Christensen is in his fourth year at Nebraska, he'll probably be playing football for two more seasons.

The junior from Bennington, Neb., is petitioning for a sixth season of eligibility. And he would appear to be a textbook case as to why such petitions can be filed. If he isn't granted a sixth season then something must be wrong with the system. Because he has been beset by injuries.

He is recovering from the most recent right now. He tore his left ACL during the Southern California game and underwent reconstructive surgery less than two weeks later. Rehabilitation requires six to eight months, if all goes well. And all was going well in early December.

He was jogging and lifting weights, optimistic that he could return for spring practice.

The injury occurred in the first quarter of the USC game. He was running downfield, maybe 20 yards from the line of scrimmage, blocking for a shovel pass. As he tried to make a cut, the knee gave out. He knew immediately what had happened. "It felt exactly the same as in high school," he said.

During his junior year at Bennington High, at the end of football season and before the start of wrestling season, Christensen tore his right ACL. The injury wiped out wrestling.

So there was no doubt about what was going to happen when he went down against USC. "That was probably the lowest point of my career because I had everything going for me, for the most part. I was having a good season so far," he said. "It just didn't work out."

He woke up the next morning without bitterness. "There's not much you can do about it. You have to kind of accept it and do what you have to do to get back to 100 percent," he said.

This isn't the first time at Nebraska Christensen has had

to come back from a serious injury. During preseason practice when he was a redshirted freshman, he was pass-blocking and "blew out" a shoulder, tore the labrum and broke the socket, either of which sounds painful enough.

He underwent surgery the first week of classes in the fall of 2005 and missed the season. He had been practicing well, working with the second-team offensive line at left guard.

"It was pretty discouraging," he said. "It wasn't what I wanted."

He had spent his first season as a redshirt on the scout team, preparing for an opportunity to contribute quickly. Developing the offensive line was a priority on the heels of a 5-6 season, Bill Callahan's first as Cornhusker head coach. And he had climbed the depth chart in the spring.

Christensen's teammates helped him deal with the frustration, roommate Adam Furtwengler in particular. "Furt" was a linebacker from Corpus Christi, Texas, initially invited to walk on by former coach Frank Solich and his staff. He had to try out with other walk-ons under Callahan. "He was one of the main reasons it wasn't as bad," said Christensen. "He's a great guy, a character."

"We've been the best of friends.

We still keep in touch."

Furtwengler, a pre-med major and two-time member of the Big 12 Commissioner's Academic Honor Roll at Nebraska, transferred to Southern Methodist and isn't playing football anymore.

The two were well-matched. Christensen, a construction management major, has been on the Commissioner's Honor Roll six times and was first-team Academic All-Big 12 last season, as well as second-team Academic All-District VII. That despite the fact maintaining focus in the classroom is more difficult when rehabbing an injury. This fall semester was one of Christensen's toughest.

☆☆☆

Even though offensive linemen regularly shuffled positions in Callahan's system, Christensen appeared to have settled in at left guard. He started the first three games there this season, after starting six of the final eight there in 2006.

FEATURING
ANDY
CHRISTENSEN

"It (wrestling) taught me a lot, I'd say, athletically and mentally. I feel like it helped me tremendously. I'd recommend it, definitely."

— Andy Christensen

Greg Austin began the 2006 season as the starter, but he battled knee injuries throughout his Cornhusker career and the effects of the injuries finally caught up.

Christensen coveted the starting job, but not at Austin's expense. "That's one guy I looked up to the whole time I've been here because of the things he went through," Christensen said.

"He had to go through a lot to get where he got. I respected that."

Austin had an advantage in their competition during the spring of 2006, not only because of his experience but also because Christensen spent some time at center while Kurt Mann was sidelined. He and Brett Byford alternated with the first and second teams until Mann returned. Austin was the left guard.

Christensen didn't mind playing center. He would do whatever he was asked for the good of the team. But one aspect of playing center frustrated him — snapping the ball. He couldn't seem to master that. As a result, he was inconsistent. "It's kind of a pain, to be honest," he said.

Try as he might, he couldn't get the hang of the skill that separates the center from those on either side. So no one welcomed Mann's return more than he did. He was comfortable at left guard, alternating with Austin, alongside Chris Patrick and Lydon Murtha, the top two at left tackle in 2006. That season was a "really fun time, the most fun I've had playing football," said Christensen.

The Cornhuskers' record in games he started was 4-2. He was confident heading into spring practice. He wasn't going to take anything for granted. But Austin had finished, leaving

the position to him.

Christensen was focused and healthy at the beginning of the spring. But with a little over a week to go, he was sidelined by an injury to his right foot. So what else is new?

Still, he was the starter at left guard when his junior season began. Finally, what he had worked so hard to achieve was his. Then came the first quarter of the USC game.

"It's been a little discouraging with all the injuries," Christensen said.

☆☆☆

Wrestling was the first sport in which Christensen participated. He started at the same time he started school. Bennington has an outstanding wrestling program, taking youngsters at an early age and developing them through high school. Cornhusker freshman Andrew Pokorny, a 125-pounder, earned prep All-America recognition last season wrestling for his dad, Alan, at Bennington High.

Alan Pokorny also was Christensen's wrestling coach, after being an assistant when Christensen was in junior high. No question, Pokorny is a "really good coach," said Christensen, a three-time state tournament qualifier and Nebraska's Class C heavyweight champion as a senior.

(He couldn't wrestle as a junior because of the knee injury, remember.)

Wrestling has been really good for him as a football player. "I would say a lot of my success here is due to wrestling in my younger years," he said. "It taught me a lot, I'd say, athletically and mentally. I feel like it helped me tremendously. I'd recommend it, definitely."

Wrestling is the toughest sport in which he has competed, he said. But beyond the physical toughness



required in training as well as in competition, "you learn where you're at all the time, how to control your body in awkward situations. Also, the mental part of it, you're one on one."

"You don't have anybody beside you to help you out."

He began wrestling at the urging of his dad, who took him to the gym, where he "started rolling around with the other kids." He progressed quickly, and while he was still in elementary school, he wrestled high school kids because of his size — he was so much bigger than those his age.

Christensen took to football naturally, too, because of his athleticism, honed through wrestling, as well as because of his size. He began playing



Andy Christensen (62) was the starting left guard, before suffering a torn ACL in the first quarter of the USC game.

in an organized program in Omaha when he was a sixth-grader. He played on the junior high team and started on defense as a 255-pound high school freshman.

He has always been a lineman, though he did play fullback on offense in junior high and enjoyed dragging would-be tacklers when he carried the ball. But he was a lineman, no question.

He preferred defensive line in high school. His final two seasons, he was credited with more than 200 tackles and 20 sacks. He even received some recruiting interest from smaller colleges as a defensive lineman. But

"now I wouldn't want to be anything else but an offensive lineman," he said.

Had he continued to play defensive line, he probably would have "torn my shoulders to pieces."

After his junior season, he began sending tapes, though he wondered how schools would respond because of the knee injury. The first football recruiting letter he received was from Wisconsin. The first school he visited was Iowa State. He and his dad drove to Ames to look at the school.

Letters from other schools, a majority of them in the Big 10 and Big 12, followed.

He also got letters from Ivy League schools, including Harvard, Brown, Pennsylvania and Cornell. His high school grade-point average was 4.1, and he ranked in the top 5 percent of his graduating class. And they were interested not only for football but also for wrestling and track and field.

His senior year, he won the state Class C shot put title, with a 60-5 toss, nearly 7 feet farther than the runner-up. He also finished third in the discus, with a throw of 157-3.

But he grew up in Bennington a Cornhusker fan. He and his dad attended a game or two at Memorial Stadium every season. The first he remembers was the game against Central Florida in 1997.

As a result, when former coach Frank Solich offered a scholarship prior to his senior season in high school, Christensen accepted. When Solich and his staff were fired, Christensen was concerned that he might not have the scholarship. But that concern was quickly alleviated.

He didn't change his mind because of the change in coaches. "I really didn't waver too much," he said. "A scholarship was the main concern. I'm glad I didn't (waver). I'm happy here."

☆☆☆

Christensen's family has supported him every step of the way, going to games home and away. His sister Beth can use a student ticket for home games. She's a sophomore thrower on coach Gary Pepin's track and field team. And his younger sister, 13-year-old Abbey, is with her folks for all of the games, even if it means having to be excused from school on Fridays to make road trips.

"She just enjoys me out there playing. I don't think she'd have it any other way," Christensen said. "She hangs on everything I do, so she'll be sad when it's over."

If he's granted the sixth season of eligibility, which would seem likely, his Cornhusker career won't be over for another two seasons. He wants to continue playing, of course. Plus, he's on schedule to graduate in August, so he'll be able to begin work on a master's degree in business administration. And with a sixth season of eligibility, his school expenses would continue to be paid.

What could be better than that for someone who embodies the spirit of student-athlete? ■

Moving Quickly

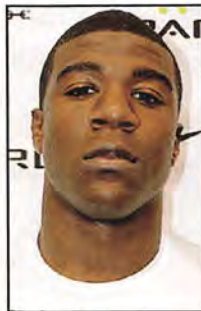
Pelini, staff working hard to solidify commitments

By Rick Shaw

When Bo Pelini was announced as Nebraska's new head coach in early December, he knew that it was imperative for him and his new staff to



Shaun Mohler



Doug Rippy

immediately get out on the road recruiting.

The recruiting process is scheduled to wrap up during the first week of February, the time frame in which athletes are allowed to sign letters-of-

intent with their chosen schools. In reality, Pelini and the rest of new coaching staff down in Lincoln had less than two months to accomplish what other college coaching staffs had been diligently working on for more than a year — building relationships with prospective recruits.

Pelini and his staff found mixed results in visiting the homes of athletes already committed to Nebraska.

Junior college linebacker Shaun Mohler was happy to meet and talk to the new Nebraska coach. However, he was disappointed in the departures of the staff members whom he had talked to and built relationships with over the preceding several

NEBRASKA COMMITMENTS FOR 2008

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	40	Hometown (School)
Will Compton	LB	6-2	214	4.5	Bonne Terre, Mo. (North County)
Ben Cotton	TE	6-6	217	4.97	Ames, Iowa
Sean Fisher	LB	6-5	210	4.6	Omaha, Neb. (Millard North)
Bryce Givens	OL	6-6	257	5.1	Denver, Colo. (J.K. Mullen)
Eric Harper	DE	6-4	220	4.62	Marrero La. (John Ehret)
Ricky Henry	OL	6-4	300	5.2	Omaha, Neb. (Burke/North Dakota State College of Science)
Tyson Hetzer	TE	6-7	265	4.75	Glendora, Calif. (Citrus CC)
Adrian Hilburn	WR	6-2	190	4.4	San Francisco, Calif. (City College of SF)
Dan Hoch	OL	6-6	302	5.21	Harlan, Iowa
Keelan Johnson	DB	6-0	195	4.5	Mesa, Ariz.
Micah Kreikemeier	LB	6-4	215	4.8	West Point (Central Catholic), Neb.
Simi Kuli	DE	6-4	270	5.0	Hawthorne, Calif. (El Camino CC)
John Levorson	ATH	6-4	185	4.55	Crete, Neb.
Cameron Meredith	DE	6-4	222	4.6	Santa Ana, Calif. (Mater Dei)
Collins Okafor	RB	6-1	210	4.54	Omaha, Neb. (Westside)
Kyler Reed	ATH	6-3	204	4.5	Overland Park, Kan. (St. Thomas Aquinas)
Riley Reiff	DE	6-6	250	4.8	Parkston, S.D.
Doug Rippy	LB	6-2	218	4.6	Trotwood, Ohio (Trotwood-Madison)
Baker Steinkuhler	OL	6-6	290	4.88	Lincoln, Neb. (Southwest)
Brandon Thompson	OL	6-6	280	5.08	The Woodlands, Texas
Joseph Townsend	DT	6-4	295	4.87	San Jose, Calif. (Foothill College)
David Whitmore	DB	6-2	190	4.5	Port Arthur, Texas (Memorial)
Josh Williams	DE	6-4	220	4.8	Denton, Texas (Ryan)

For more daily recruiting information, visit HuskersIllustrated.com, a member of the Rivals.com network.

months.

"The first thing Bo (Pelini) said to Shaun was, 'We want you Shaun — you will be spending a lot of time with me,' Mohler's mother, Deanna told Huskers Illustrated. "He told Shaun that he would be handling the defense. Bo said, 'Shaun, I do not lose.'

"Shaun seemed to like it, but, in the end, I think it was difficult for him to make a transition to a new staff and situation. He had been talking to Coach (Bill) Busch and some of the other guys for months."

The 6-foot-3, 225-pound athlete out of Orange Coast College in Costa Mesa, Calif., switched his pledge from Nebraska to Colorado in mid-December.

Another Husker commit who is intent on keeping on an open mind with Pelini and the new staff is Doug Rippy, a linebacker out of Trotwood-Madison High School in Trotwood, Ohio. However, like Mohler, Rippy had a hard time hiding his disappointment of the departures of the previous Nebraska regime.

"I'm still upset that the coaching change was made," Rippy said. "My recruiting coach, Joe Rudolph, is no longer there.

"I have to develop a close relationship with Coach Pelini. It takes me a while to get used to somebody. I had that relationship and comfort level with Coach Rudolph and Coach (Bill) Callahan."

Though he still considers himself a "soft" commit to Nebraska, Rippy plans to take a couple of other official visits before solidifying his college plans. The 6-2, 218-pound linebacker had trips to Cincinnati and Colorado scheduled during December.

Other recruits were so impressed with Pelini, that they reaffirmed their original commitments immediately after meeting the new Nebraska head coach.

Tyson Hetzer, a 6-7, 265-pound tight end out of Citrus Community College in Glendora, Calif., planned to take official visits to both Ole Miss and Louisville before firming up his college plans. That all changed when he was visited by Pelini in early December.

"Actually, it went really well," Hetzer said. "I was very pleased to meet Coach Pelini, and I actually

RECRUITING NOTES

Two Players Join NU Class

By Sean Stevens

It's been quite awhile since Huskers Illustrated has been able to report on an oral commitment in this space, but that has changed in a big way since the announcement of Bo Pelini as Nebraska's new head coach.

One of the priorities that both Pelini and interim athletic director Tom Osborne talked about during the news conference announcing Pelini's hire was an emphasis on in-state recruiting. The day after Pelini's hiring, Micah Kreikemeier of West Point, Neb., became the 23rd member of the Husker recruiting class. In fact, Kreikemeier received notice of his scholarship offer just as the Pelini news conference was ending.



Micah Kreikemeier

"I was shocked, I was absolutely shocked," Kreikemeier said. "I watched the press conference on TV, and Coach Osborne called at 5:13 p.m. We were just about ready to leave to go out to eat, and it was probably a good thing that we were running late. It popped up on our caller ID as 'Thomas Osborne,' and I saw that right away and said this could be something good."

The 6-foot-4, 215-pounder is being tabbed as either an outside linebacker, defensive end or tight end at NU. He racked up 125 tackles, three sacks, one interception and two fumble recoveries as a senior.

"Osborne saw my athleticism and what I can do at each position," Kreikemeier said. "Once we find it, he said we'll key on it, and you'll get good at it."

The following day, the Huskers received their 24th oral commitment, as 6-6, 217-pound Ames, Iowa, tight end Ben Cotton added his name to the list. If that name sounds familiar, it should. Cotton is the son of former NU offensive line coach Barney Cotton and had been committed to Louisville since late June. The



Ben Cotton

elder Cotton has been named as a part of Pelini's staff, and his son said playing under his father was too good to pass up.

"I always had it in my mind to follow my father's footsteps," Cotton said. "I knew Coach Pelini and all the guys he would be coaching with, they would be very family oriented, and they've got things in line. I had found a great place with Louisville, with Coach (Steve) Kragthorpe and Coach (Tony) Alford. I couldn't go wrong with them, but they understand the opportunity to be with family. They agree with me that it's a once in a lifetime thing."

Cotton is listed as a three-star prospect and the No. 2-ranked player in Iowa according to Rivals.com. With his pledge, he joins Harlan offensive lineman Dan Hoch to give Nebraska the top two prospects in the Hawkeye State.

While the two new commitments had the Pelini regime off to a fast start, they did miss out on one of their top targets when Keokuk, Iowa, quarterback James Vandenberg gave an oral commitment to Iowa coach Kirk Ferentz.

The Huskers had been seeking to make the eighth-ranked player in Iowa their only quarterback in the class; however, playing for his childhood favorite was too enticing. ■

decided to stick with my commitment, and I am definitely going to go there.

"I just really liked that he (Pelini) was a very standup guy, very professional, and he was very into winning," Hetzer said. "He wants to win, and I think he has the tools. I guess the criteria for that is bringing the winning attitude and winning tradition back to Nebraska. Just great character, a very good man — I liked him very much."

Kyler Reed, a 6-3, 204-pound receiver/tight end prospect out of St. Thomas High School in Overland Park, Kan., had a similar response after meeting the new head coach.

After the dismissal of Callahan Reed had contemplated taking official visits to both Kansas and Northwestern. He was considering trips to a few other schools as well. After meeting Pelini, he said he is 100-percent solid with Nebraska again.

"I'm strongly committed," Reed said. "I liked him (Pelini) — I'd say my commitment is even stronger now, especially now that I've met him. I don't anticipate changing my mind now that everything has gone

good with him."

With other recruits, their college decision will come down to much more than whether or not they like Pelini. The uncertainty in the Nebraska coaching ranks over the past several weeks prompted other schools to get back into the recruiting picture with many of the Huskers' top prospects. In a sense, Nebraska must re-recruit these athletes all over again.

Will Compton, a 6-2, 214-pound linebacker out of Bonne Terre (Mo.) North County, said despite a positive in-home visit from Pelini, he still remains undecided on his college plans heading into the end of the year.

"Coach (Bo) Pelini assured me that he knew all about me and watched my tape recently, but he had also watched my tape before at LSU," Compton said. "I was one of their top targets, one of the top recruits on the board as a linebacker. I felt really good to know about that, and he assured me that he did know all about me."

"Nebraska is my No. 1 right now, followed by Illinois and Missouri. At this time, I'm still kind of in a wait and see mode."

The blue-chipper out of Missouri

took an official visit to Illinois in late November and was slated to visit Columbia. He's hoping to line up a Jan. 11 official visit to Lincoln to check out the Husker campus. Soon after his visit to Nebraska, he hopes to solidify his decision.

Josh Williams (6-4, 220), a highly recruited defensive end prospect out of Denton (Texas) Ryan adopted a similar approach. Though he was impressed with Pelini, he wanted to see how everything shakes out over the course of the next few weeks before formalizing his college plans.

"I'm very excited about Bo Pelini," Williams said. "I look at him very strongly. He's a defensive coach, and he's really had good defenses these past couple of years."

"With that said, I'm still looking at Kentucky, Missouri and Texas as well. Once I get a chance to have my in-home visit with Nebraska, I think I'll know a lot clearer. I'm hoping that I can have a decision before the first of the year, but we'll just have to see." ■

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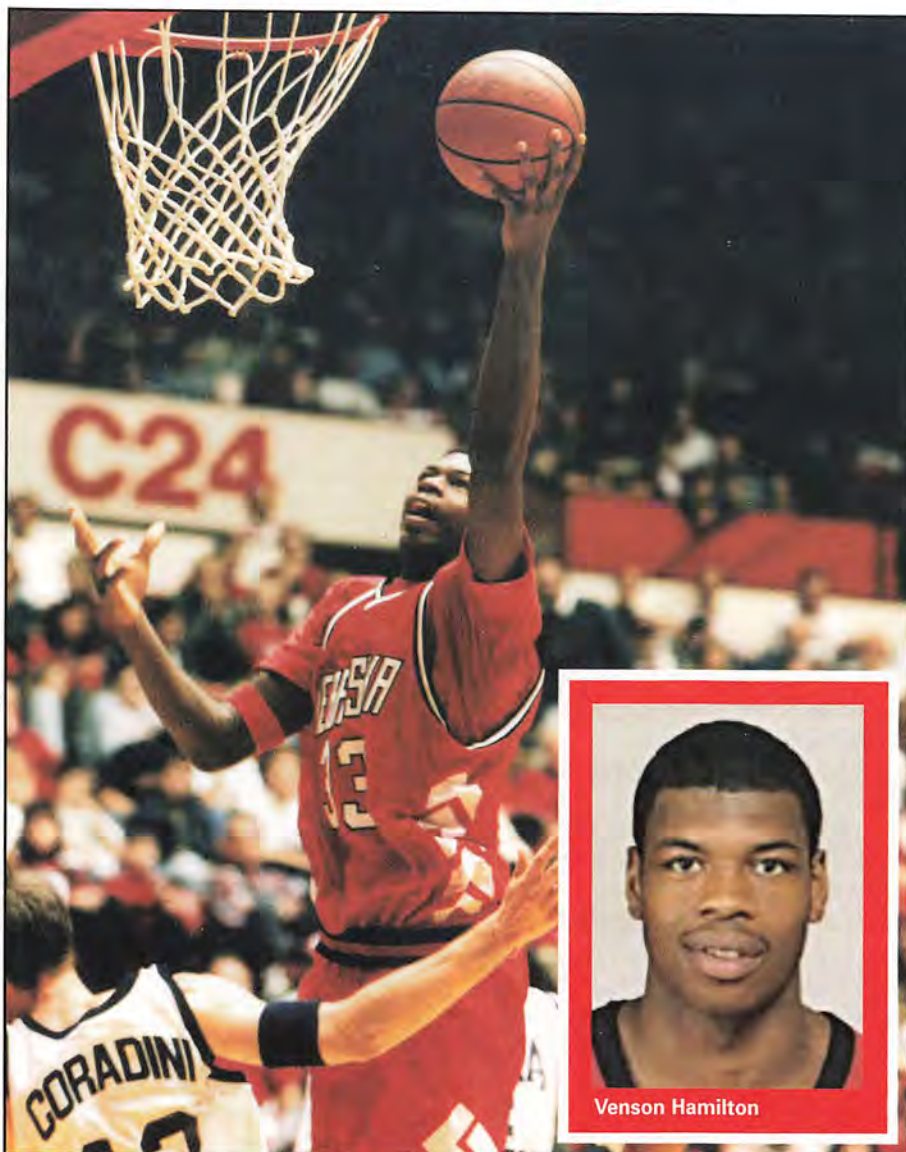
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Venson Hamilton

(Venson Hamilton's school-career record for rebounds would appear to be safe in the immediate future. But, barring the unforeseen, Cornhusker senior Aleks Maric will have moved up to second on the all-time list by season's end, well ahead of the closest competitors. Huskers Illustrated takes a quick look at some of the best rebounders in Nebraska history, beginning with Hamilton.)

VENSON HAMILTON (1996-99) NO. 33/4 6-10, 240 Forest City, N.C.

A national sports magazine considered Hamilton the "most over-rated" player in the Big 12 Conference. When asked to respond, Hamilton replied, in his typically good-natured way, that he hadn't known he was even "rated." Others didn't share the magazine's assessment. Hamilton was named conference player of the year as a senior, the first Cornhusker to be so honored since Andre Smith in 1981. Hamilton earned all-conference honorable mention as a junior, and also was picked to the all-defensive team, after breaking the school single-season rebounding record with 315. The previous record was 305, set by Chuck Jura in 1972. Hamilton broke his own record as a senior, grabbing 315 rebounds. Hamilton was the fourth player in Big 12 history to total 1,000 points, 1,000 rebounds and 200 blocked shots during his career, and he became the first Cornhusker since Jura to average a double-double for a season. He averaged 15.7 points and 10.2 rebounds in leading Nebraska to a 20-13 record and a trip to the NIT. The post-season appearance was the Cornhuskers' ninth in a row under coach Danny Nee. Hamilton spent a year at Oak Hill Academy before coming to Nebraska. He was a second-round draft pick of the NBA's Houston Rockets but has played professionally in Europe. In addition to the school-career rebounding record, he still holds the career record for blocked shots with 241 and ranks second in games played with 129. ■

LISTS

CAREER REBOUNDING LEADERS

(Modern era, since 1952)

1. Venson Hamilton (1996-99)	1,080
2. Leroy Chalk (1969-71)	782
3. Dave Hoppen (1983-86)	773
4. Rich King (1988-91)	761
5. Andre Smith (1978-81)	753
6. Chuck Jura (1970-72)	740
7. Carl McPipe (1976-79)	723
8. John Turek (2002-05)	682
9. Aleks Maric (2005-present)	*680
10. Rex Ekwall (1955-57)	679

CAREER REBOUNDING AVERAGE

(Minimum 400 rebounds)

1. Rex Ekwall (1955-57)	10.4
2. Leroy Chalk (1969-71)	10.3
3. Chuck Jura (1970-72)	9.6
4. Bill Johnson (1952-54)	9.5
5. Tom Russell (1961-62)	8.8
6. Herschell Turner (1958-60)	8.7
7. Kimani Ffriend (2000-01)	8.5
8. Venson Hamilton (1996-99)	8.4
9. Derrick Chandler (1992-93)	8.2
10. Steffon Bradford (2000-01)	8.1
Aleks Maric (2005-present)	*7.7

*does not include this season

CAREER REBOUNDING WOMEN

Total

1. Janet Smith (1979-82)	1,280
2. Karen Jennings (1990-93)	1,000
3. Kathy Hagerstrom (1980-83)	874
4. Anna DeForge (1995-98)	804
5. Maurtice Ivy (1985-88)	778

Average

1. Janet Smith (1979-82)	9.4
2. Nafeesah Brown (1992-94)	8.6
3. Carol Garey (1979-80)	8.6
4. Keasha Cannon-Johnson (2002-04)	8.4
5. Karen Jennings (1990-93)	8.4

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'You've Got to

5-foot-7 point guard's intensity renders height discussions irrelevant

Stories by Mike Babcock

As often as he could on weekends, Cookie Miller would make the 3-hour trip from Cincinnati, where he attended Harmony Community School, to his home in Charleston, W.Va.

He would travel by train, an "old-timey" train, and pass the time by talking on his cell phone, watching DVDs or listening to Lil Wayne, T.I., Jay-Z, 50 Cent and Cassidy.

He had never been on a train until he went to the Cincinnati prep school to earn a high school diploma and prepare for Division I basketball. During two seasons at Harmony Community, his teammates included Deonta Vaughn, Josh Tabb, Brian Williams, Alex Tyus, Marcus Rhodes and Tyrone Appleton.

Vaughn is in his second season at Cincinnati. Tabb and Williams are on scholarship at Tennessee. Tyus is a freshman at Florida. Rhodes is at Southeast Missouri State. And Appleton, who originally was headed to Virginia Tech, is playing at defending NJCAA champ Midland (Texas) College.

Harmony Community "really helped me develop a competitive attitude in practice, working hard every day," said Miller, a Cornhusker freshman. "You had to. It was rough."

So rough there were occasional fistfights, which "didn't do nothing but better us," he said.

And though he's only 5-foot-7 and

165 pounds, he apparently didn't back down from his bigger teammates. Did he throw some punches? "I can't call it," he said with a smile.

"Like I said, you've got to have heart."

Miller has heart. And he plays with an intensity that renders height discussions irrelevant. "Cookie knows how he has to play because he's been that size all his life," coach Doc Sadler said. "All the things he does, in my opinion, far out-weigh any size he is. It's no disadvantage to us with his size."

In addition, he's a true point guard. He's been a point guard for as long as he can remember, and maybe before. He was born with a love of the game.

"I came out of the womb with a basketball," Miller said.

By the time he was in the seventh grade, he believed he would have a realistic chance of playing at the collegiate level some day. And when he was in the ninth grade, Marshall University — in nearby Huntington, W.Va. — confirmed that belief by sending him his first recruiting letter.

By the time he was the West Virginia high school player of the year in 2005, he had no doubt, even though he would first have to go to Harmony Community School, as a result of what might have been divine intervention. It was a match made in heaven, he said. "God was on my side."

Originally, he planned to enroll at a prep school in Florida. And he and his dad set out for the school, based on



phone conversations with the coach.

On the drive south, Miller fell asleep. When he awoke, the car was headed back north. While he was sleeping, his dad had gotten a phone

Have Heart'



Freshman point guard Cookie Miller started eight of Nebraska's first nine games, averaging 5.1 points and 3.6 assists, while playing just over 25 minutes per game.

dad was uncertain about whether the coach at the prep school in Florida was still interested in his son. The coach hadn't returned phone calls for about a week before they left. But the coach had set up a meeting earlier, and his dad hoped the coach would at least follow through with that. When the phone call came, it no longer mattered.

Not only did the Harmony Community School experience prepare him athletically and academically, it prepared him to be away from home without being too far. "That really helped because I'm a momma's boy. I'll put it out there," Miller said. "I love my family, and it was hard that first year.

"That helped me get away from my mom and grow up."

He's still a momma's boy, he said. "But I can handle it way better."

Though he had other offers, his only recruiting visit was to Nebraska, where Charles Richardson was his host. Richardson told him to be in shape because Sadler would be demanding.

That was fine. Miller connected with Sadler the first time the two met. His first impression of the coach was "country dude, old fashion, likes to get the job done," said Miller. "He likes to get after you to give 100 percent, no matter what you do, whether it's 10 minutes or four hours. Everybody was saying it was going to be rough. And don't get me wrong, it was. But I was up for it. I expected it."

Though he averaged 18.1 points at Harmony Prep last season, his basketball identity isn't defined by scoring. He also averaged 8.4 assists and 2.3 steals, true point guard statistics.

"I think my role is getting every-

body involved in the game, getting everybody going," Miller said. "The first thing I work on is getting Al (Maric) involved. If Al gets involved first, that helps us get shots around the perimeter because they're going to be double-teaming and triple-teaming Al.

"And that's just going to make our jobs easier."

Some games the shots aren't going to fall, "but you can always make that other person better by putting them in a position to get that shot," said Miller.

And even if the shots aren't going in, you can play defense.

"You should always be able to move your feet," he said. ■

RESULTS, SCHEDULE

(HOME GAMES AT DEVANEY CENTER, UNLESS NOTED)

Nov. 2	*Nebraska Wesleyan	W 70-50
Nov. 6	*Wayne State	W 74-51
Nov. 10	Presbyterian College	W 67-52
Nov. 17	Alabama A&M	W 59-42
Nov. 20	Norfolk State	W 83-48
Nov. 24	@Creighton	L 74-62
Nov. 26	IPFW	W 79-62
Dec. 2	Arizona State	W 62-47
Dec. 5	@Western Kentucky	L 69-62 (ot)
Dec. 9	Rutgers	W 63-51
Dec. 11	Savannah State	W 82-37
Dec. 15	Oregon (Qwest Center, Omaha)	
Dec. 22	North Carolina Central	
Dec. 29	Alcorn State	
Jan. 4	Maryland-Eastern Shore	
Jan. 12	Kansas (ESPN)	
Jan. 15	@Colorado (FSN Midwest)	
Jan. 19	Baylor (ESPN+)	
Jan. 26	@Kansas (ESPN+)	
Jan. 30	@Missouri (FSN Midwest)	
Feb. 2	Iowa State (ESPN+)	
Feb. 6	@Kansas State (FSN Midwest)	
Feb. 9	Texas Tech (ESPN+)	
Feb. 13	Missouri	
Feb. 16	@Iowa State (ESPN+)	
Feb. 20	Kansas State (ESPN2)	
Feb. 23	@Texas A&M (ESPN+)	
Feb. 27	Oklahoma	
Mar. 1	@Oklahoma State (ESPN+)	
Mar. 4	@Texas (FSN Midwest)	
Mar. 9	Colorado (FSN Midwest)	
Mar. 13-16	Big 12 Championship, Kansas City (ESPN+)	

*Exhibition

call about an opening at Harmony Community School and had turned the car around.

Miller said he still doesn't know the whole story. But apparently his

No Secret

Husker senior in the right place at the right time

The secret to blocking shots is, well . . . there is no secret, really. You just have to be in the right place at the right time. That's according to Danielle Page, anyway.

The Husker senior from Monument, Colo., speaks with some authority on the subject. When she finishes this season, she will rank second on the school's career list for blocked shots. That's almost certain considering she's second on the list right now, behind only Janet Smith (1979-82).

And even though she will rank well ahead of everyone else on the list, she won't likely catch Smith, who had 238 blocks during her career. Page began this season with 129.

She did block nine shots in a 76-67 upset of No. 13-ranked Baylor last February, so you never know. But that was a school single-game record. And besides, statistics aren't her concern.

Page is focused on winning. She's trying to enjoy her last season, of course, though "enjoy" isn't the word she would use. Nor would she use the word "fun." She wants team success.

"So I figure if I work hard and we achieve success, then I can look back and say, 'That was a good year. We had fun. I'm glad we achieved what we did,'" she said recently.

In the past, she would have defined "fun" differently. "You're laughing, having easy practices, just kind of screwing around on a basketball court, whereas now, my senior year, it's getting back to the NCAA Tournament, playing well in the conference, things like that," she said.

Nebraska posted a 22-10 record last season and advanced to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2000, losing to Temple 64-61 at the Raleigh, N.C., Regional.



Through the first nine games, senior Danielle Page led the Huskers in scoring, rebounding and blocked shots.

That experience "kind of gave us a blueprint of what we need to do to achieve the success we want," Page said. "If we can duplicate what we did last year, we know the success we can have, along the lines of working hard in practice, going into every game knowing we can win."

As with shot-blocking, she knows something about working hard. And she knows something about perseverance, without which she wouldn't be where she is now. The two go hand-in-hand.

Her ride at Nebraska hasn't been smooth. She was slowed by a breath-

ing problem during her sophomore season and a torn ACL prior to her junior season. But she overcame both.

Actually, the breathing ailment could be traced to her freshman season, though it wasn't nearly as bad then. It never forced her out of drills and games, the way it did when she was a sophomore.

In practice, it would depend on the drills. Sometimes, she would be affected in the first drill of the day and sometimes not until the last. Conditioning drills would begin. She would go as hard as she could. And then she would be, in her word, "use-

less." She had to come out. She couldn't go anymore.

The problem wasn't as bad as the season went on, not only because practices were shorter but also because she was diagnosed with asthma and given an inhaler. After the season, she learned that the asthma was aggravated by "really bad" allergies. Her response: "Are you kidding me?"

With the breathing problem solved by medication, Page looked forward to a healthy junior season. She did until late June, anyway. She was playing in a pick-up game during a lunch break at basketball camp and jumped for a pass, came down on her right leg and felt the knee "kind of slip."

After 15 seconds of "excruciating pain," she was able to walk off the court, the diagnosis a sprain.

The next day, she was playing and during a cross-over move, the knee slipped again. She went down on the court, flat on her back. "OK, something's wrong." An MRI showed the ACL tear.

Within a week, she underwent surgery. The projection was that she would be ready for conference play, at the earliest. But she was back for the season-opener, as she figured she would be.

"They were telling me the absolute

minimum rehab time was four months," said Page. "Looking at the calendar, I knew if I did it (in) four months to the day, I could be back in time."

Had the injury occurred a week or two later, "I would have missed a couple of games," she said. "It would have hurt me more mentally if I would have had to miss some games."

Going into this season, she had never missed a game at Nebraska. And she had never started one, always coming off the bench. That has changed, though there's really not much difference. The important thing, coach Connie Yori says, is not who starts but who finishes when games are close.

Yori emphasizes rotation on defense. When a teammate gets beat off the dribble, you're supposed to rotate and try to take the charge, Page said. Instead of taking the charge on the rotation, however, she often blocks the shot, or at least forces the shooter to alter the shot's trajectory.

Typically, "I'm not blocking my own girl's shot, the girl I'm guarding," said Page. "I'm helping someone who's gotten beat on the drive. That's when I get the blocked shots.

"There's not any technique to it. You just go up there and you swat it."

She has no secret to hide. "Just

being in the right spot," she said.

She's been in the right spot about 150 times, and counting. ■

RESULTS, SCHEDULE

(HOME GAMES AT DEVANEY CENTER)

Nov. 1	*Nebraska-Kearney	W 62-48
Nov. 5	*Nebraska-Omaha	W 78-50
Nov. 9	UTEP	W 81-74
Nov. 11	Mississippi	W 80-59
Nov. 17	Florida,	W 90-63
Nov. 23	**Marist	L 66-59
Nov. 24	**Utah	L 56-44
Nov. 25	**Akron	W 75-47
Nov. 30	Creighton	W 79-65
Dec. 2	Robert Morris	W 73-58
Dec. 8	USC	W 87-69
Dec. 13	@Cal State Bakersfield	
Dec. 15	@Long Beach State	
Dec. 22	@Ohio State	
Dec. 30	Denver	
Jan. 2	Arkansas-Pine Bluff	
Jan. 9	Texas	
Jan. 12	Kansas (FSN)	
Jan. 16	@Oklahoma (Sooner Network)	
Jan. 19	@Iowa State	
Jan. 23	Texas A&M (FSN Midwest)	
Jan. 26	@Baylor	
Jan. 30	Kansas State	
Feb. 3	@Missouri (FSN)	
Feb. 6	@Colorado (FSNRM)	
Feb. 10	Oklahoma State (ESPN2)	
Feb. 17	@Kansas (ESPN360/Sunflower)	
Feb. 21	Missouri (FSN Midwest)	
Feb. 24	@Texas Tech	
Feb. 27	@Kansas State (FSN Midwest)	
Mar. 2	Colorado	
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Scott Babin

One Week

Another Pac-10 team ends NU's hopes for repeat title

By Bob Hamar

It wasn't supposed to end this way or in this place. It was supposed to end in Sacramento, Calif., with John Cook's team winning its second straight national

championship.

Instead, the season ended for the Nebraska volleyball team on a cold December night in Madison, Wis., when for the fifth time in the past six years a Pac-10 team ended its nation-

al championship hopes. This time it was the University of California that swept to a win and sent the Huskers back home to Lincoln.

It was an emotional night for the Huskers, particularly seniors Sarah Pavan, Tracy Stalls, Christina Houghtelling and Maggie Griffin, as they wore their Nebraska uniforms for the last time.

"This team has been my life for the past four years," Pavan said. "Just knowing that it's over is really hard to think about. Just looking back over these four years, I don't think I could



Nebraska coach John Cook (left) watches the action during Nebraska's second-round victory over Wichita State. Senior Tracy Stalls (11), sophomore Kori Cooper (15) and their teammates take a victory lap around the NU Coliseum after the Huskers swept Wichita State, 30-22, 30-19, 30-19, to advance to the NCAA Regional in Madison, Wis.

Too Early

have come to a place with better people than Nebraska.

"I mean it wasn't supposed to go this way, but it did. Once all the sadness is over, the thing I'm going to remember is the team I played with. What a great experience these four years have been."

The biggest disappointment for Stalls wasn't so much not winning a title, but that the team didn't play at its potential like it did down the stretch to win the 2006 national championship.

"I think what hurts the most is hav-

ing to leave this group and this team," Stalls said. "I'm disappointed in how we played. I'm disappointed that we weren't able to max out. That was the goal. As a result of that, we didn't reach as far as we wanted to go."

"But the thing that hurts is saying goodbye to this special group of people that I love so much. It's been a pleasure."

Cook thought the Huskers were ready to give it their best shot, but it didn't work out that way. While Cal played extremely well, the Huskers

were going at something less than full speed.

Cook will be spending the offseason trying to figure out why this team didn't reach its potential. It may well have something to do with the way the Huskers cruised through the latter portion of their schedule without being challenged.

The Huskers were challenged in the middle of the season. After dropping a 3-0 decision at Texas on Oct. 24, the Huskers then downed both Missouri and Kansas State in five-game matches.



Nebraska's senior class continued its assault on the record books during the NCAA Tournament. Tracy Stalls (above left) ended the year hitting a school- and Big 12-record .473, while Sarah Pavan (above right) became the first Husker and just the fourth Big 12 player to record 2,000 kills.

After that, Nebraska won 27 straight games. It wasn't until the regional semifinals that Michigan State pushed the Huskers to five games. Nebraska was able to come out on top that night, but the next night was a different story.

Cal's outside hitter combination of regional MVP Hana Cutura (23 kills) and Angie Pressey (20 kills) was too much for the Huskers to handle.

The Bears were one of three Pac-10

teams in the Final Four. That kind of competition night in and night out may have made the difference against the Huskers.

"You could tell with Cal as they were playing the match, they're used to being in point-by-point battles," Cook said. "We had not been in one of those since K-State, and that was weeks ago. I think we got a little shaky because of that."

"Those left-side hitters are going

off, our left-side hitters have to go off too. We're not used to that mentality."

Cal's left-side hitters were similar to other left sides that gave the Huskers trouble. Texas' Destinee Hooker and Juliann Faucette hammered the Huskers in Austin. Michigan State's Katie Johnson and Ashley Schatzle, another physical duo, nearly knocked off the Huskers in a regional semifinal.

It might be surprising to some that



California Dreamin'

Second-ranked Nebraska's quest for consecutive national titles ended Dec. 8, as the Huskers fell to No. 6 California, 30-28, 31-29, 30-26, at the Wisconsin Field House in Madison, Wis.

The Huskers, bidding to become volleyball's first repeat champion since USC in 2002 and 2003, ended their season with a 30-2 record, while Cal improved to 26-7 and advanced to its first national semifinal in school history.

Sarah Pavan became the first Husker and just the fourth Big 12 player to record 2,000 kills, as the senior right-side hitter finished with a match-high 16 kills to finish her career with 2,008 kills to rank fourth in Big 12 history. Senior Tracy Stalls finished with seven kills on .462 hitting, ended the year hitting a school- and Big 12-record .473, breaking Virginia Stahr's mark of .440 established in 1990. Both were chosen to the NCAA Madison Regional All-Tournament team.

Cal's outside duo of Angie Pressey and Hana Cutura led the way, combining for 43 of the team's 59 kills in helping the Bears out-hit Nebraska, .323 to .240. Cutura, who was selected as the Regional's Most Outstanding Player, totaled a match-high 23 kills on .368 hitting, while Pressey finished with 20 kills on .444 hitting, a team-high 17 digs and three blocks.

Pressey's defense helped hold Nebraska to just .240 hitting, its second-lowest offensive output of the season and only the seventh time in 32 matches that the Huskers didn't hit .300 or better.

Nebraska's middles were the bright spot of the Huskers' offense, as Stalls and Kori Cooper combined for 14 kills with only one error in 25 swings. ■

the Huskers were superior in nearly every statistical category this season than they were a year ago when they won the national title, but when the chips were down, the Huskers weren't able to get it done.

Eventually the pain of the unfulfilled potential will subside. Maybe then, the seniors may appreciate what they accomplished this season and in the last four years.

This year, Pavan became the school's all-time leader in career kills and became the first player to reach

2,000 kills with 2,008.

Pavan was named the Big 12 Player of the Year for the third straight season, while Houghtelling was tabbed as Big 12 Defensive Player of the Year.

Stalls also set a school record for hitting percentage at .474.

The senior class finished their four seasons with a 126-7 record, won four Big 12 championships, played in four straight regional finals, went to two Final Fours, was national runner-up once and won a national title.

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AVCA Showcase

At Qwest Center Omaha

Aug. 24	vs. Tennessee	W 3-0
Aug. 25	vs. UCLA	W 3-1

Holiday Inn Classic

NU Coliseum/Qwest Center Omaha

Aug. 31	vs. Creighton (NU)	W 3-0
Sept. 2	vs. Penn St. (Omaha)	W 3-0
Sept. 3	vs. Cal Poly (NU)	W 3-0

Ameritas Players Challenge

NU Coliseum

Sept. 7	vs. Duke	W 3-0
Sept. 8	vs. New Mexico St.	W 3-0

(Home matches at NU Coliseum, unless noted)

Sept. 12	Texas	W 3-0
Sept. 15	@Texas Tech	W 3-0
Sept. 22	Texas A&M	W 3-0
Sept. 26	@Kansas	W 3-0
Sept. 29	Baylor	W 3-0
Oct. 3	Kansas State	W 3-0
Oct. 6	@Colorado	W 3-0
Oct. 10	Iowa State	W 3-0
Oct. 13	@Oklahoma	W 3-0
Oct. 17	@Missouri	W 3-0
Oct. 20	Kansas	W 3-0
Oct. 21	Hawaii (Devaney)	W 3-0
Oct. 24	@Texas	L 3-0
Oct. 31	Missouri	W 3-2
Nov. 3	@Kansas State	W 3-2
Nov. 7	Colorado	W 3-0
Nov. 11	@Iowa State	W 3-0
Nov. 14	@Texas A&M	W 3-0
Nov. 17	Oklahoma	W 3-0
Nov. 21	@Baylor	W 3-0
Nov. 24	Texas Tech	W 3-0

NCAA First/Second Rounds

NU Coliseum, Lincoln

Nov. 30	South Dakota State	W 3-0
Dec. 1	Wichita State	W 3-0

NCAA Regionals

Madison, Wis.

Dec. 7	Michigan State	W 3-2
Dec. 8	California	L 3-0

The loss to Cal was definitely the end of an era — an era Cook isn't sure can be duplicated.

"Maybe I'm going to get a job as a sports writer because I'm not sure we're ever going to top this," Cook said. "They're going to have some incredible accomplishments and memories and have set a great legacy at Nebraska." ■

Bob Hamar covers the Nebraska volleyball team for the Grand Island (Neb.) Independent. He can be reached at bob.hamar@theindependent.com



Nebraska sophomore 133-pound wrestler Kenny Jordan (right) went 6-0 at the Cliff Keen Las Vegas Invitational. Jordan, the national junior college champion last season, was named the Big 12 Wrestler of the Month for November.

Second Unacceptable

Husker sophomore wrestler Jordan competes to win in everything he does

BY KATELYN KERKHOVE

It's called snaking the stadium.

The Nebraska wrestling team heads over to Memorial Stadium during preseason workouts to take on the thousands of concrete stairs that snake through the benches.

The goal is simple: hit every single

step going up and down until you encompass the entire football field.

For sophomore Kenny Jordan, the mission was much more than that this year. Unwilling to settle for second best, Jordan suggested to junior Paul Donahoe, the reigning stadium champion and national champion wrestler, that the two duke it out one Friday

morning.

"Kenny was talking all week that he was going to win," Nebraska coach Mark Manning said. "He got out there and warmed up before everyone else, and he tried to get in Paul's head."

When the race began, the two were neck and neck. But by the end, both were feeling the burn, and Jordan reached for Donahoe's shorts in an effort to slow him down.

Jordan came in second, unacceptable by his standards.

A native of Frankfort, Ill., Jordan wrestles in the 133-pound weight class and is one of Manning's most competitive athletes.

This season, he has already snagged the honor of Big 12 Conference Wrestler of the Month for November. The announcement came after Jordan went 6-0 at the Cliff Keen Las Vegas Invitational, Nov. 30-Dec. 1.

"It's a good honor," Jordan said. "I still feel good because it's big honor. It's a big accomplishment. I feel real proud. But in the same sense, there's still a lot of season left, and I just have to keep on training hard, keep on pushing."

And he will keep pushing, Manning said. The seventh-year coach said Jordan is one of his best-trained athletes. The 5-foot-6 wrestler just never tires.

"He's a really good athlete," said Manning, who isn't surprised by Jordan's early success. "If he was 6-2 and 240, he'd be one of the best football players in the country. He can run and jump, but he weighs 140 and is 5-6. But he would be a tremendous linebacker. He loves the physicalness of sports, and he's really quick and fast. He's very strong for his size, and he's a guy (with) kind of an iron lung."

Jordan amassed a 174-7 career record at Mr. Carmel High School in Illinois. He was also a two-time state champion. Manning said he found out about Jordan through a few different contacts in Illinois, including former Nebraska wrestler Tony Davis.

Coming to Nebraska two years ago, Jordan notched an 11-0 record as a redshirt freshman in open competition. Then he decided to compete at the junior college level due to maturity issues, Manning said.

While at Lincoln Community College in Lincoln, Ill., Jordan was the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) champion.

Now he's back at Nebraska with the chance to make it at the Division I level, too.

"He has the potential to be a national champion," Manning said. "So far we're enjoying Kenny, and he's only going to get better as we keep going. He's going to get a little bit more savvy as a competitor at this level."

Never willing to back down from a challenge, Jordan has a huge one facing him this season as his weight class is stacked with fierce competition.

Ranked 12th in the nation at 133 pounds, Jordan has three Big 12 wrestlers ahead of him, with Oklahoma State senior Coleman Scott sitting at No. 1.

But if he can continue to carry his never-quit attitude onto the mat, he should have a decent shot at some upsets, Manning said.

"I've always been competitive," Jordan said. "I've just always wanted to win everything I did, and anything I didn't (win) I'd get real upset. If it was (to) see who can pop the most balloons or see who can run the fastest, I just wanted to win."

He proved that in trying to beat Donahoe at snaking the stadium.

RECRUITING CLASS

Coach Mark Manning announced the signing of five recruits for 2008-09 during the NCAA's early signing period in late November: Riley Essay, Alliance, Neb.; Jon Burns, Raleigh, N.C.; Romero Cotton, Hutchinson, Kan.; Tyler Koehn, Pittsburg, Kan.; and Josh Ihnen, Sheldon, Iowa.

Essay finished fourth at Nebraska's state high school tournament at 103 pounds as a freshman, fifth at 112 pounds as a sophomore and third at 125 pounds as a junior. He is expected to

compete at 133 pounds for the Cornhuskers.

Burns had a 65-0 record and won a state championship as a high school junior and won the 140-pound title at the National High School Coaches Association Junior National Wrestling Championships in Virginia Beach, Va. He was ranked the ninth-best junior in the nation. He is expected to compete at 141 pounds.

Cotton will attempt to become a four-time state high school champion this season, after winning titles at 145 pounds in 2004, 160 pounds in 2006 and 171 pounds in 2007. He is rated among the top recruits in the nation at 189 pounds and is projected to compete at 184 pounds as a Cornhusker.

Koehn was a high school state champion at 152 pounds last season and earned All-America honors during the summer in freestyle competition at the USA Wrestling Nationals. He is expected to compete at 174 pounds.

Ihnen was runner-up at 171 pounds at the high school state championships last season and also earned All-America honors in freestyle competition at the USA Wrestling Nationals. He is expected to compete at 197 pounds.

"The important thing is these kids bring the work ethic and attitude that we want in our kids," Cornhusker assistant coach and recruiting coordinator Tony Erslund said. ■

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Eight Huskers Honored

The annual team banquet honoring 29 seniors officially wrapped up the football season in early December, with eight players receiving awards.

MVP OFFENSE: Maurice Purify, senior wide receiver

MVP DEFENSE: Steve Octavien, senior linebacker

MVP SPECIAL TEAMS: Rickey Thenarse, sophomore safety

MVP OFFENSIVE SCOUT TEAM: Zac Lee, sophomore quarterback

MVP DEFENSIVE SCOUT TEAM: Thomas Rice, senior defensive line

TOM NOVAK TROPHY: Cortney Grixby, senior cornerback

GUY CHAMBERLIN TROPHY: Bo Ruud, senior linebacker

CLETUS FISCHER NATIVE SON AWARD: Ben Eisenhart, senior safety

The Novak and Chamberlin Trophy winners are selected by a vote of media members.

Thenarse earned the special teams award for a second year, while Lee, a transfer from San Francisco City College, was the second consecutive quarterback to win the offensive scout team MVP award. Sam Keller won the award in 2006, after transferring from Arizona State. In addition J.B. Phillips, a senior tight end, was honored for earning first-team Academic All-District VII recognition.

Phillips, a graduate student in marketing, was among 12 Cornhusker football players to earn first-team academic all-conference honors. He was a four-time first-team honoree.

Junior linebacker Tyler Wortman led the group with a 4.0 grade-point average the past year. Wortman, a mechanical engineering major from Grand Island, Neb., was among only seven Big 12 football players recognized for perfect grade-point averages on the 2007 team.

Nebraska's other first-team honorees were senior linebacker Lance Brandenburg, sophomore wide receiver West Cammack, Eisenhart, senior offensive lineman Victory Haines, senior tight end Josh Mueller, junior offensive lineman Lydon Murtha, junior wide receiver Todd Peterson, senior fullback Andy Sand, senior fullback Matt Senske and junior punter Dan Titchener.

Peterson, who along with Brandenburg was on the first team for a



Maurice Purify



Steve Octavien



Rickey Thenarse

third time, also was among 11 finalists for the 2007 Wuerffel Trophy, presented to the college football player who best combines exemplary community service with outstanding academic and athletic achievement.

Ruud, junior safety Matt O'Hanlon and junior defensive end Zach Potter were second-team honorees, giving Nebraska the third-most representatives on the conference all-academic teams.

The Cornhuskers had the second-most on the first team.

SCHEDULING MATTERS

Dates for two Nebraska non-conference games in 2008 have been changed, allowing the Cornhuskers to have an early-season open date on Sept. 20. A game against Western Michigan originally scheduled for Sept. 27 has been moved to Aug. 30 and a game against Virginia Tech originally scheduled for Sept. 20 has been moved to Sept. 27. Both of the games will be played at Memorial Stadium.

In fact, all four of Nebraska's non-conference games in 2008 will be played at home, giving the Cornhuskers eight home games total, including the first five.

The Big 12 has not set the date for Nebraska's final regular-season game against Colorado.

The 2008 schedule:

Aug. 30	Western Michigan
Sept. 6	San Jose State
Sept. 13	New Mexico State
Sept. 27	Virginia Tech
Oct. 4	Missouri
Oct. 11	at Texas Tech
Oct. 18	at Iowa State
Oct. 25	Baylor
Nov. 1	at Oklahoma
Nov. 8	Kansas
Nov. 15	at Kansas State
Nov. 28/29	Colorado

SECOND-TEAM SELECTIONS

Here's another football streak that has come to an end. Nebraska didn't have a player selected for either the Associated Press or Big 12 coaches' all-conference first team for 2007. I-back Marlon Lucky and offensive tackle Carl Nicks were

included on the coaches' second team. But the Cornhuskers received only honorable mention from the AP's panel of 20 conference-area sports writers.

Lucky, Nicks and offensive lineman Matt Slauson were the AP honorable mentions, while the coaches accorded honorable mention to Larry Asante, Brett Byford, Cortney Grixby, Jacob Hickman, Lydon Murtha, Steve Octavien, Zach Potter, Maurice Purify, Bo Ruud and Dan Titchener.

Last season, Nebraska had the Big 12 Offensive Player of the Year in quarterback Zac Taylor and the Defensive Lineman of the Year in defensive end Adam Carriker, as well as first-team selections Brandon Jackson (AP) at I-back, Ruud (coaches) at linebacker and Dane Todd (coaches) at fullback.

COACHES' ALL-BIG 12 FIRST TEAM OFFENSE

QB — Chase Daniel, Missouri, Jr.
RB — Dantrell Savage, Oklahoma St., Sr.
RB — Jamaal Charles, Texas, Jr.
FB — Brody Eldridge, Oklahoma, So.
WR — Jordy Nelson, Kansas State, Sr.
WR — Jeremy Maclin, Missouri, Fr.
WR — Michael Crabtree, Texas Tech, Fr.
TE — Brandon Pettigrew, Oklahoma St., Jr.
OL — Anthony Collins, Kansas, Jr.
OL — Adam Spieker, Missouri, Sr.
OL — Duke Robinson, Oklahoma, Jr.
OL — Tony Hills, Texas, Sr.
OL — Cody Wallace, Texas A&M, Sr.
PK — Alex Trlica, Texas Tech, Sr.
KR/PR — Jeremy Maclin, Missouri, Fr.

DEFENSE

DL — George Hypolite, Colorado, Jr.
DL — James McClinton, Kansas, Sr.
DL — Ian Campbell, Kansas State, Jr.
DL — Lorenzo Williams, Missouri, Sr.
DL — Austin English, Oklahoma, So.
LB — Jordan Dizon, Colorado, Sr.
LB — Joe Mortensen, Kansas, Jr.
LB — Curtis Lofton, Oklahoma, Jr.
DB — Terrence Wheatley, Colorado, Sr.
DB — Aqib Talib, Kansas, Jr.
DB — Nic Harris, Oklahoma, Jr.
DB — Reggie Smith, Oklahoma, Jr.
DB — Marcus Griffin, Texas, Sr.
P — Tim Reyer, Kansas State, Sr.

OFFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR —

Daniel, Missouri

DEFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR —

Dizon, Colorado

SPECIAL TEAMS PLAYER OF THE YEAR —

Marcus Herford, Kansas (WR)

OFFENSIVE FRESHMEN OF THE YEAR

— Maclin, Missouri; Crabtree, Texas Tech

DEFENSIVE FRESHMAN OF THE YEAR

— Gerald McCoy, Oklahoma (DT)

OFFENSE NEWCOMER OF THE YEAR

— Deon Murphy, Kansas (WR)

DEFENSIVE NEWCOMER OF THE YEAR —

Gary Chandler, Kansas State (DB)

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN OF THE YEAR —

Spieker, Missouri; Wallace, Texas A&M

DEFENSIVE LINEMAN OF THE YEAR

— McClinton, Kansas

COACH OF THE YEAR —

Mark Mangino, Kansas

Quick Hits

IN-STATE TRIO

There's no place like home. At least that's where recruiting begins for most Cornhusker programs. And that's why the baseball team's class in the fall signing period includes three in-state athletes: Jake Kuebler from Lincoln, Nick Ludemann from LaVista and Kash Kalkowski from Grand Island.

The three have impressive work habits, according to coach Mike Anderson. The entire group does, in fact. Assistant coaches Dave Bingham and Eric Newman "worked very hard to find young men that understood what we were looking for in Nebraska baseball," Anderson said.

The group, which is "very athletic," said Anderson, includes 13. Kuebler, Ludemann and Kalkowski are among nine high school players. The other four are junior college transfers.

	High School			
Player, Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	B/T	Hometown
Cody Ashe, INF/OF	6-1	185	R/R	O'Fallon, Mo.
Cory Burleson, C/INF	6-2	195	S/R	Midland, Texas
Boomer Collins, UTL	6-0	185	R/R	Waxahachie, Texas
Seth Hood, INF	6-1	200	R/R	Moline, Ill.
Kale Kiser, INF	5-10	175	S/R	Plano, Texas
Jake Kuebler, INF/P	6-4	195	R/R	Lincoln, Neb.
Nick Ludemann, P	6-5	195	R/R	LaVista, Neb.
Kash Kalkowski, P/INF	6-1	195	R/R	Grand Island, Neb.
Curtis Peterson, P	6-4	180	R/R	Aubrey, Texas

Junior College				
Erik Anderson, P	5-11	185	R/R	Prairie Village, Kan.
Shane Dyer, P	6-3	180	R/R	Eaton, Colo.
Colt Simon, P	6-1	205	R/L	Grand Prairie, Texas
Cade Thompson, 1B/OF	6-3	200	L/L	Eatonville, Wash.

PLAY BALL

The baseball team is scheduled to open the season with four games at Stanford, Feb. 22-24, before opening the home season against the University of California-Riverside on Feb. 29, the first of a four-game series that includes a double-header at Hawks Field, scheduled for March 1.

The schedule also includes five teams that were No. 1 seeds in the 2007 NCAA Tournament: Arkansas and Wichita State as well as Big 12 opponents Missouri, Texas and Texas A&M. Arkansas, under former Cornhusker coach Dave Van Horn, is scheduled to visit Hawks Field on March 18-19.

"We're going to challenge ourselves again with this schedule," said Anderson.

Schedule

Feb. 22 — at Stanford, **23** — at Stanford (2), **24** — at Stanford, **29** — UC Riverside

March 1 — UC Riverside (2), **2** — UC Riverside, **4** — Nebraska-Kearney, **7** — Northern Colorado, **8** — Northern Colorado (2), **9** — Northern Colorado, **11** — South Dakota State, **14** — at Kansas State, **15** — at Kansas State, **16** — at Kansas State, **18** — Arkansas, **19** — Arkansas, **21** — Oklahoma, **22** — Oklahoma, **23** — Oklahoma, **25** — Northern Colorado, **26** — Northern Colorado, **28** — at Texas, **29** — at Texas, **30** — at Texas

April 1 — at Creighton, **4** — Texas Tech, **5** — Texas Tech, **6** — Texas Tech, **8** — at Iowa, **11** — at Oklahoma State, **12** — at Oklahoma State, **13** — at Oklahoma State, **15** — Wichita State, **18** — Kansas, **19** — Kansas, **20** — Kansas, **22** — Creighton, **25** — at Baylor, **26** — at Baylor, **27** — at Baylor, **29** — Western Illinois, **30** — Western Illinois

May 2 — Louisiana-Lafayette, **3** — Louisiana-Lafayette, **4** — Louisiana-Lafayette, **9** — Texas A&M, **10** — Texas A&M, **11** — Texas A&M, **13** — Creighton at Rosenblatt Stadium, **16** — at Missouri, **17** — at Missouri, **18** — at Missouri, **21-25** — Big 12 Tournament at Oklahoma City

NCAA Regionals — May 30-June 2

NCAA Super Regionals — June 6-9

College World Series — June 14-25



Mike Anderson

SOFTBALL SIGNEES

Coach Rhonda Revelle announced the signing of three recruits in mid-November, all of them high school athletes, including teammates Ashley Hagemann, a right-handed pitcher, and Nikki Haget, an infielder-outfielder from Elkhorn High in Omaha, Neb. The other is Kirby Wright, a catcher from Cortlandt Manor, N.Y. Wright is just the second Husker recruit from New York. The first was Alison Bodley, who earned letters in 1979, 1980 and 1981. Wright picked Nebraska over Pittsburgh and Syracuse. Hagemann considered Creighton, Texas and Oregon State, while Haget drew interest from Iowa, Iowa State, Texas A&M and Creighton. The two played on Elkhorn High teams that won four consecutive state Class B championships. All three recruits have earned high school All-America recognition.



Rhonda Revelle

GOLF RECRUITS

The Nebraska men's golf team signed two scholarship recruits in the early signing period, while the women's team signed three. The men's recruits are Jordan Reinertson of Gibbon, Neb., and Scott Willman of Prairie Village, Kan. The women's recruits are Maddie Sheils of Boise, Idaho, Natalie Gleadall of Stratford, Ontario, Canada, and Carolyn Schorgl of Leawood, Kan.

"Overall, this may be the best class we have ever signed here at Nebraska," said women's coach Robin Krapfl, who is in her 21st season at the Huskers' helm.

Sheils is among the top 30 junior players in the United States. Gleadall is one of the top junior players in Canada. And Schorgl is a top player in the Kansas and Missouri junior ranks.

Reinertson finished eighth at the Nebraska Men's State Amateur last summer and was selected to compete with the best junior golfers in the world at the Footjoy Invitational in North Carolina and the Rolex Tournament of Champions in Ohio. Williams, who tied for second at the Kansas 6A state tournament, has competed on the Future Collegians World Tour.

NCAA QUALIFIER

Lara Crofford, the first Husker true freshman since 1999 to compete at the NCAA cross country championships, finished 85th in the women's 6K at Terre Haute in mid-November. Her time was 21:26.7, ninth among all freshmen. Crofford was named to the All-Big 12 and All-Midwest Region teams as a result of top 10 finishes in each. She finished ninth in the NCAA Midwest Regional at Peoria, Ill., leading the Huskers to fourth place. Junior Natalja Zarenko also earned All-Midwest Region recognition, finished 22nd. The other Huskers finishing in the top 50 were Rachel Carrizales (33rd), Joslyn Dalton (40th). The Husker men were 12th at the regional, with senior Peter van der Westhuizen finishing 43rd to lead the way.

THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'

This is not your father's Big 12 Conference. Consider that the receivers on the American Football Coaches Association All-America team came from the Big 12: wideouts Michael Crabtree or Texas Tech and Jordy Nelson of Kansas State and tight end Martin Rucker of Missouri.

Crabtree was the first freshman included on the team since Georgia's Herschel Walker in 1980. Defensive back Aqib Talib of Kansas also was picked to the team, as was Oklahoma offensive lineman Duke Robinson.

BRIEFLY

● How about this? Only two of Nebraska's 12 football opponents in 2007 won't be playing in bowl games, Iowa State and Kansas State.

● Former Cornhusker football player Steve Warren will coach the Omaha Beef of the United Indoor Football Association in 2008. Warren's assistants include another former Cornhusker, Tony Veland. The season is scheduled to open in March. ■

CROSSWORD

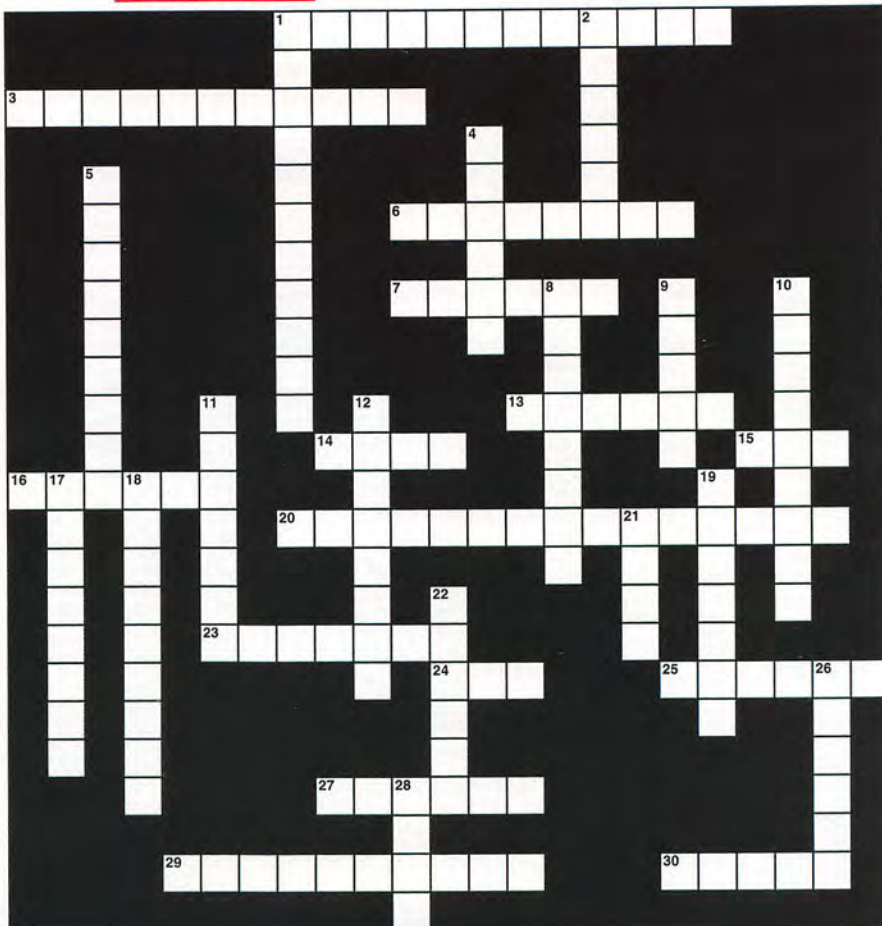
ACROSS

- 1 2008 nonconference opponent
- 3 Offensive lineman who missed most of season
- 6 2007 special teams MVP
- 7 New offensive line coach
- 13 Offensive coordinator
- 14 2007 scout team defensive MVP
- 15 Bo Pelini's former team
- 16 Missouri's bowl game
- 20 Opponent in 2008 opener
- 23 Interim athletic director
- 24 2007 scout team offensive MVP
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- 27 2007 offensive MVP
- 29 Steve Pederson's new school
- 30 Second team All-Big 12 selection

DOWN

- 1 Ex-Husker def. lineman with Tennessee Titans
- 2 1997 Outland Trophy winner
- 4 Oklahoma's bowl game
- 5 2007 Cletus Fischer Native Son Award winner
- 8 2007 Big 12 champion
- 9 2007 Heisman Trophy winner
- 10 Bo Pelini's alma mater
- 11 Big 12 coach of the year
- 12 First Big 12 opponent in 2008
- 17 2007 defensive MVP
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- 19 Receivers coach
- 21 Bo Pelini's brother
- 22 New head coach
- 26 2007 Tom Novak Trophy winner
- 28 2007 Guy Chamberlin Trophy winner

Answers in February issue



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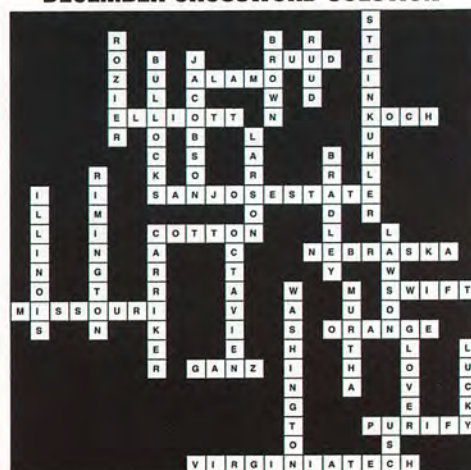
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**Mike
BABCOCK**

THE QUESTION WAS TACTFUL but transparent.

Bo Pelini might have known it would be asked in some form during the news conference to introduce him as Nebraska's new head football coach on the first Sunday in December. Paraphrased, in part, the question was this: Now that "you're the guy," will you have to temper your emotions?

Pelini started to answer but was forced to pause because of laughter.

The room was jammed, and not just with reporters, though there were plenty of them. And everyone was laughing, not at him but rather with him. It was laughter of approbation.

Pelini turned toward interim athletic director Tom Osborne, who sat to his left, with a wry smile.

Osborne shrugged as if to say, "Back to you, Bo."

Again composed, Pelini took the question head on, like a linebacker filling a hole, pads squared up and ready to deliver a blow. "I'm going to be who I am. I'm not going to change. Bo Pelini's not going to change," he said. "But you know what? Along the way, you learn things. You learn and make mistakes and learn some things you can do and some things you can't do. I've grown."

"I've made mistakes along the way. I'd be the first one to admit that. But I'll continue to learn from them. It makes you better along the way. I believe that's the case. But the heart and soul of who I am, what I believe in, that won't change. You just have to channel it in different ways, at times."

One such time was in late November of 2003 at Memorial Stadium, following a 38-9 loss against Kansas State. That was the basis for the aforementioned question, anyway.

When then-Cornhusker coach Frank Solich crossed the field for the obligatory meeting with Kansas State coach Bill Snyder, Pelini headed toward Snyder, too, and had to be restrained. No post-game pleasantries from Nebraska's defensive coordinator. He wanted a piece of Snyder.

And you know what? Those Cornhusker fans who remained to the bitter end probably did too, even some of the ones who were quick to criticize Pelini for such unbecoming behavior.

OK, we remember the incident. But why devote a column to it?

Well, for one thing, Lornell McPherson brought up the subject at the news conference. And for another, it illustrates why Pelini is exactly the right guy for the job.

"I can't even explain how happy I am right now," said McPherson, a junior cornerback in 2003. "You just have to be around Bo, his energy and his spirit, the passion he has for

the game.

"I'm pretty sure the gentlemen that are playing now, they're going to be thankful that they've got a coach like Bo to come in and get things turned around."

And what was his favorite memory of Pelini's one season at Nebraska?

"When he chewed Coach Snyder," McPherson said. Of course, Pelini is a players' coach, and the Snyder incident had to be seen in such a context.

Here's what happened. Kansas State led 31-9 with 2:30 remaining. The game was decided. Nebraska fans were heading to the exits. But when the Wildcats recovered a fumble near midfield, Snyder sent his first-team offense back out, as he had the previous season at Manhattan, leaving in starters in a 49-13 victory. So quarterback Ell Roberson, who had made disparaging remarks about Jammal Lord (his Cornhusker counterpart) during the week, and tailback Darren Sproles were back on the field. And in three plays, two carries by Sproles and one by fullback Ayo Saba, the score was 38-9.

Afterward, Solich referred questions about leaving in starters to Snyder. He had an opinion on the subject, he said. But he wouldn't elaborate other than "that's the way it is."

The head coach has to take such a stance. It's proper procedure, protocol, professional behavior, like not sending starters back on the field when a game has been decided, for example. But an intense and openly passionate defensive coordinator can be forgiven such an indiscretion.

McPherson's first impression of Pelini was, "This guy's ready to go; he's juiced. He had as much energy as his players did," McPherson said. "That's a good thing."

Four years later, by all accounts, that still characterizes Pelini. He's passionate about his players. He's passionate about the game. And that's what Nebraska needs.

He's also more mature. He was given an interview for the job to replace Solich, though it's clear he wasn't seriously considered. "That was a different point in time, a different point in my life, and I'm happy to be here right now," he said in response to a question about having been passed over.

"That's all that really matters to me. Things happen for a reason in life, and I understand that. I'm more prepared today than I was four years ago to be a head football coach."

He's ready to be "the guy." And as McPherson said, the players are going to be thankful for that. So are the fans, even the ones who claimed to have been put off by the way Pelini reacted to Snyder. ■



Bo Pelini showed his passion as defensive coordinator in 2003.

Mike Babcock is a former sports columnist for the Lincoln Journal Star. He has covered Nebraska football for nearly 30 years. Mike can be reached at MBABCOCK1@neb.rr.com or P.O. Box 6782, Lincoln, NE 68506.

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